



ORDINARY 22A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

20 STF – Be still for the presence of the lord OR

74 STF – For the music of creation

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

87 STF – Praise to the Living God! OR

71 STF – Even as the world began

Readings: Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

Hymn:

158 STF – Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders OR

101 STF – Before the world began, one Word was there

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

473 STF – Moses, I know you're the man

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness OR

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

Be still, in the midst of the noise.

Be still, in the midst of the business.

Be still, in the midst of all the distractions and the other places you could be today.

Be still, for the Spirit of God is here, and is calling you to notice,

If you can just be still.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

20 STF – Be still for the presence of the lord OR

74 STF – For the music of creation

Opening Prayers

Throughout this month, The Vine's opening prayers come to us from All We Can, as part of joining with them in a commitment to pray, act and respond to the conflict in Palestine/Israel, and include an invitation to support their Middle East Justice Appeal.

Let us pray.

God of peace, as we gather to worship, we know we live in a world riddled with conflict. As we gather to worship, we open our hearts to meet with you in prayer, in song, in our listening and reflections.

Come, O God, by your Spirit we pray.

Today, as we worship, our thoughts turn to the Middle East, and to the Israeli attacks on Gaza, and we pray to you – O God – that you might bring peace and reconciliation amongst all this historic and current conflict.

Living, loving God, we know that your heart is always for peace, and never for violence. We pray for all working for peace in the Holy Land, especially our own Methodist charity, All We Can, as part of The Just Peace Coalition, as they seek peace and equality.

Today, and in the days to come, may our prayer turn to action as we find ways to advocate for peace, and to play our part in calling for an end to Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine. As we pray, help us also to campaign for an end to arms sales, to give where we can to support those making a difference, and to find out more so we can share true stories with our friends and community about this conflict.

Come, Holy God, come Prince of Peace, this and every day, here and in every place, we pray.

Amen.²

To find out more and make a donation on behalf of your church – you could visit allwecan.org.uk/appeals/middleeast

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

You will need: a giant outline of a speech bubble, speech bubble shaped post it notes or pieces of paper, pens and pencils, large sheet – or on screen - the words 'Give thanks to the Lord!' displayed.

In the psalm, we are called to praise and glorify God. There are all kinds of ways to do this – through singing, praising, telling and remembering. We're encouraged to make sure we keep seeking God and are reminded of all the wonderful things God has done, so we're going to have a go at doing that now.

Spend a few moments talking to the person next to you about something you are thankful to God for, or for what God has done for you, it might be a recent act or something that took place a long time ago. What can you praise God for or rejoice about today? When you have finished talking, write a word or phrase, or draw on the post it note. When you're ready bring it forward to put on our church speech bubble. This will be a symbol of us making known God's deeds and expressing our thanks for all the amazing things God has done for us.

(Give everyone time to participate in the activity and add their own speech bubble to the giant one).

Well, what a sight to see all these things we are praising God for! Isn't it incredible to see and know that God has been at work in our lives? It helps our faith to grow deeper, knowing that God is with us. Would a few of you like to come and help me read some of these out so we can share God's goodness with everyone? *(share what's on a number of the post its with everyone gathered).*

Let's close by praising God together, I'll say a short phrase and you reply, 'Give thanks to the Lord!'.

Leader: For when you helped us.

All: Give thanks to the Lord!

Leader: For when you gave us strength.

All: Give thanks to the Lord!

Leader: For when you guided us.

All: Give thanks to the Lord!

Leader: For when you cared for us.

All: Give thanks to the Lord!

All: Amen.³

Hymn:

87 STF – Praise to the Living God! OR

71 STF – Even as the world began

³ All Age Talk written by Gail Adcock

Readings: Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

Hymn:

158 STF – Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders OR

101 STF – Before the world began, one Word was there

Reflections on the readings

There are moments in life when everything changes, not because we planned for them, not because we felt ready, but because something (or someone) calls us in a new direction.

Moses has one of those moments in today's reading from Exodus. He is simply tending sheep, he isn't looking for God, he isn't expecting a revelation. In fact, he has spent years trying to leave his past behind. Once a prince of Egypt, then a fugitive, he has settled into an ordinary life in the wilderness.

And then he notices something unusual: a bush that burns without being consumed. The remarkable thing is not simply that the bush is on fire. The remarkable thing is that Moses stops. He pays attention. He turns aside to see.

Perhaps that's where every encounter with God begins: not with certainty or perfection, but with the willingness to notice.

Our lives are often so busy that we hurry past the sacred moments scattered through ordinary days: a conversation that changes us, the beauty of creation, the quiet voice of conscience, the cry of someone in need, or the unexpected kindness of a stranger. God still speaks, and the question is whether we are paying attention.

When God calls Moses, it isn't to offer him comfort, it is to send him back into the place he least wants to go: back to Egypt, back to painful memories, back to confront injustice.

Moses immediately begins making excuses:

- "Who am I?"
- "What if they don't believe me?"
- "What shall I say?"

It's comforting, somehow, that one of the greatest leaders in Scripture begins by doubting himself. We often imagine that people of faith are fearless, but the Bible tells a different story and it is good to remember that today. Faith is not the absence of fear, it is choosing to take the next step even while we are afraid.

God doesn't answer every one of Moses' questions. Instead, God simply says: "I will be with you."

That promise echoes throughout Scripture and reaches us today. God's message is never: "I will remove every obstacle," or "Everything will be easy," but always: "I will be with you."

Then we turn to Jesus.

Peter has just declared that Jesus is the Messiah. It is a moment of insight and celebration, but almost immediately, Jesus begins to explain what that Messiahship will look like: Not triumph, military victory or earthly power, but suffering, service, sacrifice.

Peter cannot bear it, he tries to stop Jesus. Surely this isn't how God's story should unfold, is it? Perhaps Peter is speaking for all of us: we long for faith that makes life simpler. We hope that following Christ will lead us around suffering rather than through it. Yet Jesus insists that love always carries a cost.

To follow him is not to seek suffering for its own sake, but to be willing to stand alongside those who suffer. To choose compassion over comfort, justice over convenience, truth over popularity, love over self-interest.

Jesus' words about "taking up your cross" have sometimes been misunderstood. They have been used to encourage people simply to endure abuse, injustice or oppression. But I do not believe that is what Jesus means, the cross was not something people chose because suffering was virtuous. It was the consequence of challenging systems of violence and exclusion with radical love. Jesus calls his followers to live with courage, to speak truth, to defend the vulnerable, to welcome the outsider, to forgive when forgiveness is costly, to work for peace in a world that often rewards division.

That path is not always easy, but it is the path that leads to life.

There is an interesting connection between today's readings. When Moses asks God for a name, God replies: "I AM WHO I AM."

It is a mysterious answer, one that continues to exercise scholars, and is an important part of Hebrew theology. God refuses to be boxed in or fully defined, God is always more than our words can contain.

Jesus, too, refuses to fit the expectations people place upon him. He will not become the kind of Messiah people imagined. Perhaps that should make us cautious whenever we become too certain that we have completely understood God.

Faith is not about possessing God, it is about continually discovering that God is larger, deeper and more loving than we imagined, and perhaps that discovery never ends.

The burning bush was not consumed. Perhaps that can be an image for the Church today? We live in uncertain times, where Churches are changing, or need to. The communities we live in and serve are changing, the world is changing. There are moments when it can feel as though hope itself is burning away.

Yet God's presence continues to shine, not because we are strong, but because God is faithful.

Like Moses, we are invited to notice.

Like Peter, we are invited to keep learning.

Like Jesus, we are invited to walk the path of courageous love.

May we have eyes to see the holy ground beneath our feet. May we trust that God is with us, even when the road ahead is uncertain. And may we have the courage to follow wherever love leads.

Amen.

Questions for Reflection

- When have you experienced a "burning bush" moment: an ordinary moment that invited you to see life differently?
- Jesus calls us to take up our cross in the service of love and justice. What might that look like in today's world, both personally and as a church?

- If God is always greater than our understanding, how might that shape the way we listen to those whose experiences or beliefs differ from our own?

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

473 STF – Moses, I know you're the man

Prayers of intercession

Holy and Living God,
You called Moses from the wilderness,
and you called the disciples to follow Christ on the path of love.
Call us again today,
that we may hear your voice amid the noise of our lives.

[Pause]

God of justice,
You saw the suffering of your people in Egypt,
and you continue to see every place where people are oppressed today.
We pray for those living with war, violence, discrimination, poverty, and exploitation.
Give courage to those who speak truth to power,
wisdom to those who lead nations,
and hope to those who long for freedom.

May your justice roll down like a mighty river,
bringing dignity and peace to all people.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of compassion,
We pray for your Church throughout the world.

Where churches are anxious about the future, grant hope.

Where communities seek to be places of welcome, strengthen them.

Help us to be known for generosity, humility, and love, always willing to listen as well as to speak.

Lead us to recognise the holy ground beneath our feet,
and the sacred worth of every person we meet.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God who journeys with us,
We pray for all who face difficult decisions,
new beginnings,
or uncertain futures.

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

For those changing jobs,
starting school or university, retiring, moving home,
or facing unexpected change.

When fear threatens to overwhelm them,
may they hear again your promise: "I will be with you."

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of healing,
We remember all who carry heavy burdens.

Those living with illness, pain, anxiety, grief, or loneliness.
Those whose faith feels fragile.
Those who struggle to see hope.

May they know your comfort, your strength,
and the companionship of those who care for them.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of hope,
Send us from this place ready to notice your presence,
to challenge injustice with courage,
to love generously,
and to walk faithfully in the footsteps of Christ.

May our lives bear witness not to certainty, but to hope;
not to fear, but to love;
not to ourselves, but to your kingdom.

These prayers we offer
in the name of Jesus Christ,
who calls us to follow him.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Let us turn back to God, what is God's already – these gifts are mere tokens of all that we have received by your grace, O God. And as we offer them back to you, we ask for your blessing on our lives, and on all who will use this money to help fulfil your mission here on earth, and in this church.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness OR

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

You go from this time, knowing yourself loved.

Try not to forget that, in the days and weeks to come.

You go from this place, called by the living, loving God to follow the path of discipleship.

Try not to stray from that path, in the days and weeks to come.

You go from this place, with the Spirit of God going ahead, within and around you.

May you know that to be true, this and every day,

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker