



## ORDINARY 23A

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

**Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A**  
**6th September 2026**



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**36 STF – There's a quiet understanding OR**

**19 STF – Be still and know that I am God**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him OR**

**49 STF – God beyond all names**

Readings: Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

**Hymn:**

**186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! OR**

**593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God OR**

**665 STF – Make us your prophets, Lord**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling OR**

**712 STF – Put peace into each other's hands**

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

**Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on [www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## **Call to worship**

Your gospel is a gospel of love, O God.  
And today we come into this time and space to worship you,  
To celebrate the love you have for us,  
To share that love with each other,  
And to take that love out into a world that is crying out for it.  
Come, by your Spirit, we pray,

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

36 STF – There's a quiet understanding OR

19 STF – Be still and know that I am God

## **Opening Prayers**

In the Methodist Church we have been afforded lots of opportunities for new beginnings. We have January 1st, our Covenant services, the beginning of Advent when our new lectionary year begins, (the new cycle of church readings) and of course September 1st which is regarded as the start of the Methodist year a time when we traditionally welcome our new ministers, a time for reflection, planning looking forward, with all that in mind, let us pray...

As we think about new beginnings let us take some time to give thanks. Let us start by giving thanks through a broad lens, firstly for this world we live in, a world of richness, beauty, a world where there is enough for all, enough for each and every one of us. A world of beauty, beauty to see, to hear, to experience... a world of possibilities.

Now let us, if we can, take a look closer to home. What do we have to give thanks for personally? I know some days that can be easier than others so if today all you can give thanks for is this moment, an opportunity to hear anew the word of God, an opportunity for a fresh perspective perhaps, then so be it.

When we look at the wonder of the world let us look at ourselves and acknowledge the times we have missed the mark, when in word, in thought, in deed we have veered off the path, as we acknowledge we are sorry help us to remember that you are a God of new beginnings. Not just those collective new beginnings mentioned above, individual fresh starts available to each of us because our God is a God of new beginnings, offering us hope, restoration, and transformation.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Lorna Dobson

## All Age Talk

Have you ever fallen out with someone? Maybe a friend, a sibling, someone at school, someone at work, or maybe even someone at church! I think we can all think of a time and maybe the smile on your face shows that.

Sometimes falling out happens over something tiny, like whose turn it was, who said what, or someone not listening properly. Again let's try not to glance at one another just yet. However, it's true that even small things can grow bigger if we do not deal with them kindly. Sort of like a weed in a garden, one moment it's small and unnoticeable, the next day it's grown and obvious.

In our Bible reading today, Jesus speaks about what we should do when things go wrong between people. And Jesus does not say, "Go and tell everyone else." Jesus does not say, "Put it on social media." Jesus does not say, "Stay cross forever."

Jesus says, first, go and speak to the person.

Jesus is in many ways wonderfully simple, but it can be really hard. It takes courage to speak kindly when we feel hurt. It takes love to listen when we think we are right. It takes patience to try and make peace. Why would we do that? You see, Jesus cares about how we treat one another. The church is not meant to be a place where we pretend everything is always fine. It is meant to be a place where we learn to forgive, listen, and start again.

Jesus is teaching us that being people of peace matters. This is not because being right is the most important thing, but because people matter to the parental God. However this passage today goes on further with something special, Jesus gives this amazing promise. Where two or three are gathered, God is there with them.

That means when we gather here today, Jesus is with us. When we pray together, Jesus is with us. When we try to forgive, listen, and love one another, Jesus is with us.

So here is a challenge for us this week. If there is someone you have fallen out with, could you take one small step towards peace? Maybe that means saying sorry. Maybe it means choosing not to talk about someone, but instead speaking kindly with them.

Let us pray.

Loving parental God, help us when relationships feel difficult. Give us courage to say sorry, patience to listen, and kindness in the way we speak. Thank you that when we gather in your name, you are with us.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

## Hymn:

28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him OR

49 STF – God beyond all names

**Readings:** Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

## Hymn:

186 STF – Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! OR

593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

## Reflections on the readings

“But, we've always done it this way...”

Do you have a certain way of folding your laundry? Perhaps you begin by folding sheets, table cloths and towels side-to-side, or do you favour top to bottom? When it comes to garments, what's your preferred method? Maybe you learned your way of doing things from your mother or perhaps you copied a method you observed someone else using? Do you ever get slightly (of course only slightly!) annoyed when someone gives you your things folded differently (do you accept them graciously and then refold them in your usual style?).

Likewise, how do you organise the washing-up? If you were a Brownie (Guide) of a certain era you were taught to wash cutlery, then glass, followed by china tableware and then, lastly, cookware (pots and pans).

Do the ways in which you were taught to carry out basic domestic chores still govern the way you complete these tasks today? Are some of your habits so deeply embedded that you continue without active thought.

“But, we've always done it this way...”

Churches have habits. Visiting preachers will be told about congregational preferences. Do you say the Lord's Prayer in the 'traditional form' or use the more recent ecumenically agreed form? Is there a plate at the door: is it used for a retiring collection or is it expected that it will be used as worshippers enter so that it can be brought forward for blessing during the service (with the result that the uninformed visitor may feel embarrassed)?

When do (good) habits become rituals? In our churches have we ritualised our habits: invested them with great significance and meaning? (A ritual being a formal practice: communal rituals often embody beliefs and retell myths.) Are ther habits or traditions healthy or are they things that we should let go?

For our Jewish friends, the Passover *Seder* is a ritual of crucial significance. Since the time of the Exodus, they have been able to say, “But, we've always done it this way...” In our reading from the Book of Exodus today we found out why.

Let's set our reading (Exodus 12:1-14) in context. Over the last couple of months some of our Old Testament readings from the lectionary have traced the main themes for the stories of the Patriarchs, Abraham and Jacob. We have journeyed with God's chosen people from the Tigris-Euphrates basin to Canaan and down into Egypt. Sometimes their movement seemed to be at God's behest, at other times their migration was governed by other factors (famine and inter-tribal warfare). At the close of the Book of Genesis, Jacob and his sons were not resident in the Promised Land but in Egypt as the honoured guests of the Pharaoh. Was this the fulfilment of God's promise?

Shortly after the commencement of the Book of Exodus Moses, a descendant of Jacob, becomes the central (human) character. If you've not heard the story recently maybe you recall it from school/Sunday School days?

Here's a synopsis: There was a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph (Exodus 1:8), he regarded the presence of the Israelites in his land as a threat and so he enslaved them.

He ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill any boy born to an Israelite mother (but they failed to comply). Moses' mother ensured his safety by placing him in a basket among the bulrushes. Raised by an Egyptian princess, Moses grew to maturity. Having killed an Egyptian slave master, for beating a Hebrew, Moses fled to Midian. In Exodus 3 God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush. God sent Moses back to Egypt to speak with Pharaoh (the successor to the Pharaoh of his youth), and lead the people to safety.

Moses was a reluctant leader but God showed his power through him. Pharaoh's magicians, with their magic, could not replicate the signs that Moses could perform. Pharaoh was obdurate: despite the eloquent arguments of Aaron and the signs of Moses, he would not let the children of Israel go.

So, God sent 10 plagues (Exodus 7-11). He turned the waters to blood, unleashed plagues of frogs, gnats and flies. Then livestock died of disease. Next, people broke out in boils. There were devastating thunder and hailstorms. Then came a plague of locusts, destroying the crops. Darkness enveloped the land. In spite of all these disasters, Pharaoh would not budge, he would not let the people go.

God announced that the next plague would be the death of the firstborn of both humans and animals: (and that afterward Pharaoh would let the people go). (Exodus 11:1)

Now, pause awhile, if this were to be the plot for a Hollywood blockbuster we would be waiting for the spectacular special effects and the CGI to show this culminating horror of a plague. Instead, we read the passage that we have heard today. Amidst the narrative account of the evidence of God's almighty power we have the divine instructions for a communal sacramental meal.

This is the institution of the Pesach (passover) Seder meal. We are told in considerable detail how the people are to organise themselves in groups (such that none will be excluded). Each group is to select an animal from the flock. Then we are told how they are to kill, prepare, cook and consume it and what they are to do to ensure that there are no left-overs. They are instructed to smear some of the blood of the animal on their doorposts (to ensure that the Angel of Death will pass-over their houses).

This is not a leisurely meal, the haste of its preparation and consumption is clear because they will not even have the time to allow the bread to rise and they are to eat the meal dressed ready to depart.

The Exodus (the Going-Out) is yet to occur but the meal is pivotal, it marks their assurance of imminent release from servitude. They are taking in bodily fuel for the journey and trusting to God for their survival. It is a 'last meal.'

God decrees that the Passover shall, hereafter, mark the beginning of each new year. For His people "This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance." (Exodus 12:14). To this day, observant Jews may well say, "But, we've always done it this way..."

As Christians we may observe that there are certain similarities between our observance of Holy Communion and the Passover Seder (not least because, in the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, Jesus is sharing a Passover meal with his disciples when he institutes the ritual action of the sharing of the bread and the cup). In both commemorations the story of God's faithfulness to His chosen people is told and specific food and drink are consumed in community.

The story of the Passover (and of the Exodus) is foundational for the Jewish tradition: that hurried meal marks a pause in the series of plagues that are soon to come to a devastating conclusion. Even as, in the hectic cycle of the events in Holy Week, Jesus'

Supper with his friends offers a return to normality, in the form of a shared meal: and an insight into the importance of the relationships that will secure the legacy of his teaching. These are communal rituals that embody beliefs and retell myths. When we sit down to a Seder or gather for Holy Communion, it's so much more than washing dishes, folding textiles or maintaining family traditions, we know that these things were ordained by God. These rituals matter, it's good that, "we've always done it this way..."

Thanks be to God!

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### Hymn:

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God OR

665 STF – Make us your prophets, Lord

### Prayers of intercession

Heavenly Father, your Son Jesus Christ has promised that you will hear us when we ask in faith: receive the prayers we offer.

We pray for your people throughout the World, praying especially for those living in countries in crisis.

For people who are struggling owing to the aftermath of natural disaster.

For those in places where there is fighting and bloodshed,

for any in countries affected by the atrocities of terrorists.

We think of countries ruled by corrupt and brutal leaders...

We hold before you those suffering danger and persecution.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

As our government reconvenes after its summer break:

we pray for our own leaders, at both National and Local level, and for those who administer our laws.

We pray for the work of the emergency services, for all those who work in hospitals and in the medical profession.

For the work of care homes and carers and for all those who are caring for loved ones in their own homes.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We hold before you people of faith across the globe.

We pray for priests and religious leaders who help to promote and maintain the communal rituals that bind together communities of faith.

Though we may follow different pathways, may we work together to protect humankind from all that undermines well-being.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Wendy Kilworth-Mason

We pray for our local community, we think of people known to us... those who are sick, those who suffer, those who grieve.

We pray for the distressed, the lonely, the homeless, the unloved and the unemployed.

We pray for any young people who are facing new challenges at the beginning of the academic year: especially for those enrolling in new schools, colleges or universities.

We pray for those in need of a friend, those wanting someone to reach out to them with a caring and loving hand.

We pray for those suffering poor mental health.

Father God, we ask that you sustain and inspire all those working to help others.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

We commend to your keeping, Father, ourselves and each other, our families, our neighbours, and our friends. Help us all to reflect your love in the way we treat other people, so that your love spreads throughout the world.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer. Amen.**

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

### **We will now take up the offering.**

God of love,

You have poured out your blessings on us, like a fountain of abundance.

Help us to return our love to you, in gestures, gifts, kindnesses and prayerful action.

Put these gifts to use by your grace, we pray,

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling OR

712 STF – Put peace into each other's hands

### **Blessing**

Let us go from here, with the light of love shining from us.

Let us go from this time, with the peace of the Christ radiating out into our lives.

Let us go from this act of worship, and discover that each moment is an opportunity.

Show me how to worship you this week, O God.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Wendy Kilworth-Mason

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker