



ORDINARY 24A

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



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

24 STF – Come, now is the time to worship OR

609 STF – As we gather in your presence now

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

132 STF – O God, our help in ages past OR

391 STF – O breath of life, come sweeping through us

Readings: Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 114; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

Hymn:

499 STF – Great God, your love has called us here OR

676 STF – Christ, from whom all blessings flow

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

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

683 STF – Great is our redeeming Lord

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

In a world of colour,
Holy God, help us to paint your love on every landscape, every relationship, every person.
As we worship you, God of the full rainbow,
Help us to see something of your kaleidoscope of wonder and joy,
This and every day, we pray.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

24 STF – Come, now is the time to worship OR

609 STF – As we gather in your presence now

Opening Prayers

Let us pray,

Just take a moment to quieten yourself, make sure you are sitting as comfortably as you can, have a bit of a wriggle if you need to.

Close your eyes and take a breath,

Take another breath, a deeper breath, in through your nose and out through your mouth,

Together let's try to breathe in for a count of four, hold for a count of two, then breath out slowly for a count of four, just repeat a couple of times.

Imagine you are sitting on a river's edge, in your mind's eye imagine the river, the trees, plants, birds and animals all around.

Can you hear the sounds, feel a gentle breeze. Listen carefully, can you hear the river, the tinkling sound as it journeys on, making its way to the sea.

God, we are thankful for your world, the beauty of all you have created, we are thankful too for your presence in our lives, but we know this is not a world without problems, that we too have our problems.

What is weighing you down?

What would you like to let go of?

Can you imagine placing one or two of your concerns in the river, letting go.

As you imagine letting go, let us pray,

We hold on too tightly to things we can't control, holding onto hurts, regrets, fears, help us release our grip.

Help us remember that you love and forgive us, help us love and forgive ourselves too.

Let us give thanks for this moment to stop and breathe.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

Now, gently, I want you to start refocusing on the space you are in, sounds, smells, temperature, gently open your eyes.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Optional Prop - a backpack with a few books inside.

Have you ever had to carry something really heavy? Maybe a school bag, shopping bags, or a suitcase. At first it might feel okay, but after a while it starts to hurt your shoulders and slow you down.

In our Bible reading today, Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive someone. Peter suggests seven times, which probably felt quite generous. But Jesus says, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Jesus is not asking Peter to count forgiveness on a chart. Jesus is showing that forgiveness should be part of how we live.

Jesus then tells a story about a servant who owed the king a huge amount of money. It was so much he could never pay it back. But the king showed mercy and forgave him completely. Yet when that same servant met someone who owed him a much smaller amount, he refused to forgive.

That might seem strange, but sometimes we can do the same. We love being forgiven, but we find it harder to forgive others. It can be like carrying a heavy bag (use the prop if have it). When we hold on to anger, hurt, or bitterness, it weighs us down. Forgiveness does not mean pretending something did not matter. But it does mean asking God to help us put the heavy thing down.

(If your using the prop maybe you might want to take out different items to signify forgiving people for example: the mean words someone has said, the time that person cut in line in front of you etc etc)

Jesus reminds us that we are people who have been forgiven by the parental God. So we are called to share that same kindness with others.

So here is a challenge for us this week. Is there someone you need to forgive, or someone you need to say sorry to? Maybe this week we can ask God to help us take one small step towards kindness, peace, and forgiveness.

Let us pray.

Loving parental God, thank you that you forgive us with such generous love. Help us to put down the things that weigh us down, and teach us to forgive others with kindness and courage.

Amen.³

² Opening prayers written by Lorna Dobson

³ All Age Talk written by Matt Forsyth

Hymn:

132 STF – O God, our help in ages past OR

391 STF – O breath of life, come sweeping through us

Readings: Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 114; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

Hymn:

499 STF – Great God, your love has called us here OR

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Reflections on the readings

There are some stories in the Bible that seem almost too big to imagine. This week, the sea parts, a whole people walk through on dry land, an army disappears beneath the waves... Exodus 14 is one of the defining stories of the Old Testament: the story of liberation.

Whether we hear it as history, poetry, or sacred memory, its message has echoed through generations. Whenever people have struggled against slavery, oppression or injustice, they have returned to this story. Because the Exodus is not simply about crossing a sea, it is about discovering that the future need not be determined by the past, that God makes a way where no way seems possible.

I wonder whether we all have our own versions of the Red Sea: moments when we feel trapped, perhaps a difficult relationship or a grief that seems too heavy to carry, a world that feels overwhelmed by conflict, inequality or environmental crisis.

Sometimes it can seem as though there is water ahead and an army behind us, with no obvious way forward. The people of Israel certainly felt that, and their first response was not confidence but panic: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us here?" It is an almost sarcastic question, born from fear.

And perhaps that is reassuring, the Bible rarely expects its heroes to be fearless. Faith is not pretending that danger isn't real, faith is taking one more step, even when we cannot yet see how the story will end.

Paul's letter to the Romans brings the conversation much closer to home. His concern is not armies or miracles, it is church life. In the early church, as today, there are people disagreeing, people judging one another, people disagreeing about which foods they should eat, which holy days they should observe.

These may seem like small issues, but Paul recognises something important: communities can be damaged just as easily by everyday judgement as by great conflict. His words remain remarkably relevant: how easily we divide ourselves, over theology, politics, worship styles, social issues, generational differences, and a thousand other things!

We are often tempted to believe that those who disagree with us must somehow be less faithful, but Paul gently resists that temptation: "Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another?"

That does not mean that every opinion is equally good or that justice does not matter. Paul himself speaks strongly against oppression and injustice elsewhere, but he reminds us to

approach one another with humility. Each of us is still learning, each of us sees only part of the picture, each of us belongs ultimately to God.

That changes *how* we disagree.

Then Jesus tells Peter a story about forgiveness. Peter thinks he is being generous: "Should I forgive seven times?"

Jesus replies, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times." In other words, don't keep score. Then comes the parable: a servant is forgiven an impossibly large debt, yet he refuses to forgive someone who owes him almost nothing. The contrast is shocking, Jesus is asking whether the grace we receive actually changes us.

If we know ourselves to be forgiven, can we become more forgiving? Notice that forgiveness here is not about pretending that harm does not matter. The king does not deny the existence of the debt.

The servant has genuinely done wrong, forgiveness is not denial, nor is it permission for abuse to continue. For many people, especially those who have experienced deep trauma, forgiveness may take years. Sometimes it begins not with reconciliation, but simply with refusing to let bitterness have the final word. There are relationships where distance is healthy, there are situations where justice and protection are essential. Jesus *never* asks people to remain in harm's way.

Instead, he invites us to resist becoming imprisoned by resentment, because resentment can become another kind of slavery.

Perhaps that is where today's readings meet: the Israelites are freed from Pharaoh, Paul wants Christians to be freed from judgement, and Jesus wants us to be freed from the chains of unforgiveness.

Freedom, in the Bible, is never simply about escaping something, It is about becoming new. That is not easy, none of us gets it right all the time, we all carry wounds, we all carry regrets and we all need grace. The good news is that God never waits until we have perfected ourselves before walking with us.

God walks beside frightened people at the edge of the sea. God remains present with imperfect churches trying to live together. God continues to offer mercy to people who struggle to show mercy themselves. Perhaps that is where hope begins: not in our ability to be perfect, but in God's determination never to give up on us.

And if God refuses to give up on us, perhaps we can begin to refuse to give up on one another.

Questions for reflection/discussion:

- Where do you long for God to make "a way through the sea" in your own life or in the life of our world?
- Paul encourages Christians not to judge one another over matters of conscience. How can we disagree honestly while still treating one another with grace and respect?
- Forgiveness is rarely simple. What might it mean to seek freedom from resentment while also honouring truth, justice and healthy boundaries?

Amen.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

Hymn:

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

683 STF – Great is our redeeming Lord

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray.

God of freedom,

You led your people through the waters,

you remained faithful when hope seemed lost,

and in Christ you continue to lead us towards lives shaped by love.

Receive now the prayers of your people.

A moment of silence.

Loving God,

We pray for your Church throughout the world.

Where Christians and people of faith are divided, bring patience and understanding.

Where churches struggle with disagreement, teach us to listen with humility.

Help us to remember that we all stand before your grace,

and that our unity is found not in perfect agreement but in your love.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of justice,

We pray for all places where people long for freedom.

For communities affected by war, occupation, persecution, or discrimination.

For those trapped by modern slavery, human trafficking, poverty, or systems that deny dignity.

Strengthen all who work for justice and peace,

give wisdom to those in authority,

and courage to those who speak on behalf of the vulnerable.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of mercy,

We pray for families, friendships, and communities where relationships have become strained.

Where there is anger, bring understanding.

Where there is hurt, bring healing.

Where reconciliation is possible, grant courage.

And where it is not safe or possible, grant peace, wisdom, and the support people need to flourish.

Teach us all to receive your forgiveness with gratitude, and to extend compassion wherever we can.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of compassion,

We remember those who are carrying burdens today.

Those who are ill, those who grieve.
Those who feel trapped by anxiety, addiction, loneliness, or despair.
Those facing difficult choices or uncertain futures.

In the quiet of our hearts,
we name before you those who need your love most today.

A time of silence.

May they know your presence beside them, making a way where none seems possible.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of hope,
As we leave this place,
help us to become people of grace.

Where the world offers judgement,
may we offer understanding.

Where the world deepens division,
may we build bridges.

Where the world nurtures resentment,
may we choose mercy.

Lead us into the freedom that Christ offers,
that our lives may become signs of your kingdom.

These prayers we ask through Jesus Christ, who leads us from fear into hope,
from bondage into freedom, and from death into life.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Living, loving God, help us to see this world through your loving, forgiving, hopeful eyes.
As we look out on our lives, our families, our communities, our world, this and day,
Help us to use our gifts, including those given today,
To tune the whole world to that loving, forgiving, hopeful song that beats from your heart, O
God.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

Holy, creative God,
Help us to follow in your ways this week,
That we might set ourselves apart from the systems of greed and corruption that rage in
your world,
And join in with the story of love, grace and peace, that flows from your heart,
This and every day,
Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker