



ORDINARY 25A

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



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

565 STF – Only by grace can we enter OR

530 STF – To be in your presence

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

116 STF – Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation OR

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded

Readings: Exodus 16:2-15; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

Hymn:

593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour OR

462 STF – Come with me, come wander

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

287 STF – When I survey the wondrous cross OR

518 STF – Father, hear the prayer we offer

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

459 STF – Captain of Israel's host, and Guide OR

472 STF – May the Sending One sing in you

Blessing

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Call to worship

Only by grace can we enter,
Only by your love are we enabled to worship you, O God,
Only because of your love for us, can we share your love with the world.
Humbly accept our worship this day, we pray,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

565 STF – Only by grace can we enter OR

530 STF – To be in your presence

Opening Prayers

As I began thinking about our prayers today two things were brought to mind, firstly the fact that traditionally it is usually around September that we start thinking about harvest festivals (I am mindful the focus of our harvests both in our churches and farming/growing communities has evolved) and our gospel reading which today is the challenging parable from Matthew 20:1-16 of the workers in the vineyard, my thoughts turned to the hymn “For the fruit of all creation”

We pray for this creation that God brought to life and for that we are thankful. We give thanks for the food, shelter, relationships...

Now as we pray our prayers of gratitude I know not everyone in the world (perhaps not even everyone reading or hearing this) have swathes of things for which they feel grateful, life is not always fair or easy. I pray that we know more equality and love.

Help us be mindful of God’s grace, know that we are loved just as we are, loved for who we are, that there is grace and love enough for each of us, for the workers who arrive at the start of the day and for the ones who don’t arrive until the end.

We are sorry when we are judgemental and unforgiving. When we don’t say or do those things to make this world a better place, when we say or do things that we should have thought twice about, help us remember, even in those moments we are loved and forgiven.

As we celebrate the bounty in the world, the fruits of the earth, help us also celebrate and give thanks for the fruits of your spirit, those gifts you have given each and every one of us to enrich this world, help us embrace all we have to offer and work towards making this world a better place.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord’s Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Lorna Dobson

All Age Talk

Life's not fair?!

Those are words we would all said at one point in our life. I dare say it is something we not only say when we are children but as adults too. Life's not fair! Maybe someone got a bigger slice of cake, someone had a longer turn, or someone got the same reward even though you felt you had worked harder. Most of us know what it feels like when something does not seem fair.

In our Bible reading today, Jesus tells a story about a landowner who hires workers for his vineyard. Some workers start early in the morning and work all day in the hot sun. Others are hired much later, some near the very end of the day. But when it is time to be paid, they all receive the same amount.

Now, if we are honest, that does sound a bit unfair at first. The people who worked all day thought they should get more. They had worked longer, carried more of the heat, and done more of the job. But the landowner reminds them that he has been generous. He has given them what he promised, and he has chosen to be kind to those who came later.

Jesus tells this story to show us something about the parental God. God's love is not given out like a prize for whoever works the hardest or longest. God's grace is generous. God welcomes people not because they have earned it, but because God is loving and kind. It can be quite a hard thing to get around in our heads whatever age we are.

Sometimes we can be tempted to look at what other people have and think, "Why have they got that?" But Jesus invites us to see things differently. Instead of being jealous of God's kindness to others, we can be thankful that God is kind to all of us. So remember, when you think life is not fair, maybe stop and pause for a moment and remember God's love for them.

Amen.³

Hymn:

116 STF – Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation OR
455 STF – All my hope on God is founded

Readings: Exodus 16:2-15; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

Hymn:

593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour OR
462 STF – Come with me, come wander

Reflections on the readings

The God who provided manna in the wilderness is the same God who provides for us today.

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Today, let us hear reflections on our three readings from minister Lansford Penn-Timothy.

Lansford writes...studying for the ministry, one of my lecturers used to say, *"The wilderness is often the classroom where God teaches His people to trust Him one day at a time."*

Growing up in Sierra Leone, I learned from experience that there were seasons when life taught me not to take food for granted. Some days as a family, we did not know where the next meal would come from, but somehow there was always enough. It might have been a simple meal of rice and cassava leaves or a bowl of peanut butter stew, but somehow, we were always provided for. Looking back now, I realise that my parents were not simply feeding us; they were quietly teaching us to trust God's daily provision. We learned that life was not about having an abundance stored away, but about believing that God would give us what we needed for each new day.

In our reading, the Israelites had only just experienced God's miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Yet, as soon as they entered the wilderness and faced hunger, they began to grumble. They looked back on Egypt with selective memory, forgetting the oppression and remembering only the food. Not knowing where their next meal would come from caused them to doubt God's faithfulness.

How often are we like them? When life becomes difficult, we can forget how God has led us in the past. We become anxious about tomorrow and wonder whether He will provide for today.

In Exodus 14:10–14, only a few days after celebrating their freedom from Egypt, the Israelites panic at the sight of Pharaoh's army approaching. They complained, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?" They had already forgotten God's mighty deliverance. Moses reminds them: "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

Throughout Scripture, God's people are often prone to what I call spiritual amnesia. At the Red Sea, they forgot the God who had defeated Egypt. In the wilderness, they forgot the God who had parted the sea. Elijah forgot the God who had answered by fire. The disciples forgot the one who had calmed every storm. Yet God remained faithful. Repeatedly, he called his people to remember his mighty acts, because remembering yesterday's faithfulness gives us confidence for today's challenges and hope for tomorrow. The God who provided manna in the wilderness still provides daily bread for his people today, so when the Israelites murmur and complain, God listens to their complaints. He provides manna from heaven. Every morning, they received just enough for that day. In doing so, God was teaching them an important lesson: to trust him daily.

The manna was more than food; it was a sign of God's faithful presence. Each new morning was an invitation to believe that the God who had rescued them would also sustain them. Jesus echoed this truth when he taught His disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." God rarely gives us tomorrow's grace today. Instead, he gives us what we need for each step of the journey, inviting us to depend upon him afresh every morning.

Perhaps today you find yourself in a wilderness of uncertainty, grief, illness, or difficult decisions. Remember that the God who provided manna in the desert is the same God who provides strength, wisdom, peace, and hope for his people today. His provision may not always come in the way we expect, but it always comes according to His perfect timing and faithful love. Therefore, let's be encouraged and encourage one another that the God who provided manna in the wilderness is the same God who provides for our needs, and he is faithful.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways has God provided for me when I least expected it?
2. What does it mean for me to trust God for my "daily bread"?
3. How can I replace grumbling with gratitude as I journey with Christ this week?

There are certain people in history whose lives inspire us because they refused to allow adversity to define them. One such person was Nelson Mandela. Imprisoned for twenty-seven years, much of that time on Robben Island, he endured harsh conditions, forced labour, and long periods separated from his family. Many believed prison would break his spirit. Instead, it strengthened his resolve. He emerged, not consumed by bitterness or revenge, but committed to reconciliation, justice, and the future of his nation. His circumstances changed neither his convictions nor his purpose.

The Apostle Paul writes his letter to the Philippians from prison. Like Mandela, he faces uncertainty. He does not know whether he will be released or executed. Yet there is one crucial difference. Paul's confidence rests not in a political cause or personal determination, but in Jesus Christ. That is why he can say, *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."* Christ was not simply part of Paul's life; Christ was his life.

The purpose of this reflection is to remind us that our circumstances need not determine our character or our calling. Whether we experience success or suffering, certainty or uncertainty, we are called to "live in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ."

Throughout the Bible, we discover that God is far more interested in our character than our circumstances. Circumstances change, sometimes suddenly and painfully, but God's calling upon our lives remains constant.

Think of **Joseph**, the boy with the coat of many colours. One day he was his father's favourite son; the next he was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and imprisoned. Yet through every twist and turn of his life, Joseph remained faithful to God. His circumstances did not define his character. Instead, God used every hardship to prepare him for the purpose He had ordained. As Joseph later declared to his brothers, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good"* (Genesis 50:20).

Then there is **Esther**. She found herself in a position she had never expected, living in a foreign palace at a time of great danger for her people. It would have been easier to remain silent and protect herself. Yet she recognised that God had placed her where she was *"for such a time as this"* (Esther 4:14). Her circumstances became the very stage on which God's saving purpose was revealed.

Above all, we look to **Jesus**. He left the glory of heaven to take on human flesh. He experienced rejection, misunderstanding, betrayal, suffering, and ultimately the Cross. Yet none of these changed his mission. His circumstances never determined His calling. He remained obedient to his Father's will, even to death on a cross, and through His obedience God brought salvation to the world.

When Christ is at the centre of our lives, He gives us the courage to persevere, the grace to remain faithful, and the strength to bear witness to him whatever challenges we face. Like Paul, we discover that our greatest purpose is not simply to survive life's trials, but to live each day in a way that honours Christ and makes Him known to others. Paul also reminds us that suffering for Christ should not surprise us. Following Jesus may bring opposition, misunderstanding, or sacrifice. Yet we do not face these challenges alone. God is at work, strengthening us through His Spirit and through the fellowship of His Church.

In a world that often encourages us to live for ourselves, Paul calls us to live for Christ. Our greatest purpose is not simply to succeed, but to know Christ, reflect his love, and make

him known. When Christ is at the centre of our lives, even our difficulties can become opportunities to witness to his grace and faithfulness. Therefore, let's be encouraged and encourage one another that our labour in the Lord is not in vain. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. Like Nelson Mandela, who is that one person for you who refused to allow adversity to define them? Share their story with someone this week.
2. What does Paul's statement, "For to me, to live is Christ," mean in my own life?
3. How do I respond when my faith is challenged or misunderstood?
4. What would it look like for me to live more "worthy of the Gospel" this week?

In the United Kingdom, employment law rightly seeks to ensure that workers are treated fairly. Employers are expected to pay at least the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage, prevent discrimination, and honour the terms of employment. If two people do the same job under the same conditions, we naturally expect them to be treated fairly and paid accordingly. Justice in the workplace matters, and rightly so.

It is against that backdrop that Jesus shares the parable. We can often take offence at the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. Workers who laboured all day received exactly the same wage as those who worked only the final hour. We can almost hear the early workers protesting, "That's not fair!"

But Jesus is not giving a lesson on employment law or workplace rights. He is teaching us something far more fundamental about the Kingdom of God. The landowner represents God, and the wage represents his grace. Grace is not earned by the number of hours we have worked, the length of time we have been Christians, or the sacrifices we have made. Grace is God's free and generous gift to all who come to him.

This passage reminds us that God's Kingdom operates on the principle of grace rather than human merit. Whether someone has followed Christ for a lifetime or has only just come to faith, the gift of salvation is the same. Instead of comparing ourselves with others or questioning God's generosity, we are invited to rejoice that his mercy is abundant, his welcome is wide, and his love is freely given to all who respond to his call. This parable also challenges the danger of comparison. Perhaps the closest parallel to this parable is the story of the prodigal son. The elder brother compares himself with the prodigal son. He said, "All these years I've been working for you..." He believes he deserves more because he has served longer. The father responded to his complaint with these words, "Everything I have is yours." The issue is not fairness but grace, the unmerited favour of God poured out for us.

You see, throughout Scripture, comparison never produces peace. Cain lost his brother because he compared (Genesis 4). Saul lost his kingdom because he compared (1 Samuel 18). In the story of the Prodigal Son, the elder brother lost his joy because he compared (Luke 15). Peter lost sight of his calling because he compared (John 21). However, Jesus calls us to a better way. The Kingdom of God is not built on comparison but on grace. At the foot of the Cross, there is no first and last, no greater and lesser, no deserving and undeserving. There are simply sinners saved by grace. And when we truly understand grace, we stop asking, "Why has God blessed them?" and begin saying, "Thank You, Lord, for blessing us all."

How easily we compare our gifts, opportunities, ministries, or blessings with those of others. Comparison often robs us of joy and blinds us to God's goodness in our own lives. Instead of celebrating God's generosity to others, we can become resentful.

Jesus invites us to rejoice in a God whose grace is abundant, generous, and freely given. He delights in welcoming those who come to Him, whether early or late. His Kingdom is not built on human merit but on divine mercy.

May we never take God's grace for granted, nor begrudge it when it is poured out on others. Instead, let us give thanks that the same gracious Lord calls each of us into His vineyard and blesses us beyond what we deserve. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do I respond when God blesses someone else in unexpected ways?
2. What does this parable teach me about the generosity of God's Kingdom?
3. How can I reflect God's grace and generosity to others this week?⁴

Hymn:

287 STF – When I survey the wondrous cross OR

518 STF – Father, hear the prayer we offer

Prayers of intercession

There is a response to our prayers when I say, “Lord, hear us.” Please respond with the words, Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

Let us pray.

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, head of the church, we pray for the Church throughout the world. Strengthen your people to live lives worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Give us courage when we face challenges, faith when we struggle with doubt, and perseverance when the road of discipleship is difficult. Help us, like the Apostle Paul, to place Christ at the very centre of our lives, so that in all we do we may honour Him and proclaim His love to the world.

We pray for our church family. Strengthen our fellowship and deepen our love for one another. Help us to encourage those whose faith is weak, to support those who are weary, and to welcome those who are searching for hope. May our church be a place where Your grace is experienced, Your Word is faithfully proclaimed, and Your love is shared with all people

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord, we pray for our communities, our nation, and our world. We remember places where there is conflict instead of peace, injustice instead of compassion, hunger instead of plenty, and fear instead of hope. We pray that you raise up leaders who will govern with wisdom, integrity, and humility. Inspire Your Church to be a witness of reconciliation, justice, generosity, and love, reflecting the compassion of Christ to all people. The effect of climate change is placing mounting pressure on food security and living standards. Lord, grant us the courage to be diligent stewards of your creation and to work together to reverse the trend of climate change.

⁴ Reflection written by Lansford Penn-Timothy

Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

We thank You for the generosity of Your grace. Forgive us when we compare ourselves with others or fail to rejoice in the blessings You have given them. Free us from envy and resentment, and fill our hearts instead with gratitude. Help us to remember that all we have comes from You, and teach us to be generous with our time, our gifts, and our resources, just as You have been generous towards us.

Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

We pray for those who are walking through wilderness experiences today. We remember those who are anxious about the future, those living with illness, those who mourn the loss of loved ones, those burdened by loneliness, financial pressures, or difficult decisions. Just as You provided manna each morning for the Israelites, we pray that You provide the strength, peace, wisdom, and hope they need for their journey. Teach us to trust You one day at a time, believing that Your grace is sufficient for every new morning.

Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

Finally, we present our own needs to you. We pray that you will meet us at our point of need and bless us with your comforting presence and peace. Grant us the grace to be worthy disciples. When we are tempted to grumble like the Israelites, remind us of the countless ways You have already provided for us. When we struggle like Paul, remind us that Your grace is sufficient. When we compare ourselves with others, Lord, we pray that you remind us of your abundance and help us to walk in confidence, trusting that you, who have been faithful in the past, will continue to guide and sustain us in the days ahead.

We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Oh gift-giver,
Bringer of hope,
Lord of light,
Prince of peace,

We have received so much from your blessings. Help us to show your love in our gifts, our actions and our worship this week, we pray

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

459 STF – Captain of Israel's host, and Guide OR
472 STF – May the Sending One sing in you

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Lansford Penn-Timothy

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

May you go from here, knowing yourself to be truly blessed,
Following in the steps of the heroes of history and the everyday disciples who have sought
to follow Jesus, to share love, to spread justice, to practice peace.
May you join in that pilgrimage today, in Jesus' name,
Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker