



ORDINARY 26A

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

Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A
27th September 2026



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

401 STF – Come, sinners, to the gospel feast OR

441 STF – As water to the thirsty

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

247 STF – I danced in the morning when the world was begun OR

377 STF – Down the mountain the river flows

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

Hymn:

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy OR

434 STF – Rock of Ages, cleft for me

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

317 STF – At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

345 STF – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

Come be our guide, O God,
As we seek to follow in your way.
Come light our path, O God,
As we worship and sing to you this day.
Come be our leader, O God,
as we search for what is ours to do as part of your mission here on earth.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

401 STF – Come, sinners, to the gospel feast OR

441 STF – As water to the thirsty

Opening Prayers

Let us pray,

God of love, hope, forgiveness, we come before you, just as we are, bringing with us our hopes and dreams, fears and doubts, those things that are heavy to carry.

If you haven't already, I invite you to close your eyes, take a deep breath and take a moment to quieten yourself.

As you breathe, I would like you to imagine you are sitting in a peaceful space, a calm nourishing place,

a place where we can meet our God in honesty and love.

Imagine, if you can, laying down at least some of those things that trouble you, weigh heavily upon you

As we lay things down let us acknowledge where we have gone wrong, the things we could have done differently.

God loves us and forgives us... God, help us love and forgive ourselves.

In this moment, let us bring our thanks to God for all that we have

Let us give thanks for this moment, this time to stop, breathe and to start again.

Let us think of things we can give thanks for...

I do know some days it is easier to feel gratitude than others, but I encourage you to find at least one thing you can give thanks for in this moment.

Today, in prayer, we meet God, help us breathe in love and peace and breathe out our fear, shame and uncertainty, leaving behind those things that weigh us down and trying to walk on more lightly in your world accepting and sharing your love.

Amen.²

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Lorna Dobson

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Optional Prop: two pieces of paper or card. On one write "YES" and on the other write "NO".

I wonder if you have ever said yes to something, but then not actually done it. Maybe someone asked you to tidy your room, put your shoes away, do some homework, or help with something in the house. And perhaps you said, "Yes, I'll do it," but then somehow it never quite happened.

Or maybe it has happened the other way around. At first you said, "No, I don't want to," but after a little while you changed your mind and did the right thing after all. I think if we are honest, most of us have probably done both at some point.

In our Bible reading today, Jesus tells a story about two sons. A father asks the first son to go and work in the vineyard. The son says, "No, I will not." That does not sound like a great start. But later on, he changes his mind and goes. Then the father asks the second son to go and work in the vineyard. This son says, "Yes, I will go." That sounds much better, doesn't it? But the problem is, he never actually goes.

You could hold up the "NO" card here and ask: "Is this the son who did the right thing?" Then hold up the "YES" card and ask: "Or was it this one?" The strange thing in the story is that the son who said no at first was actually the one who did what the father asked, because in the end his actions changed.

Jesus was speaking to people who looked and sounded very religious. They knew all the right words and could give all the right answers, but they were missing what God was really doing in front of them. They were saying yes with their mouths, but not always saying yes with their lives.

And that is a challenge for us too. Following Jesus is not just about saying the right words, singing the songs, or being in the right building. Those things can be good and important, but Jesus is also interested in how we live. Do we show kindness? Do we forgive? Do we help when we can? Do we listen when God is nudging us to do the right thing?

The good news is that the first son reminds us that it is never too late to turn around. Even when we get it wrong, even when we say no, even when we make mistakes, the parental God still invites us to change direction and follow in love.

So here is a challenge for us this week. Let us not just say yes to God with our words, but try to say yes with our actions too. Maybe that means helping someone without being asked. Maybe it means saying sorry. Maybe it means being kind to someone who needs it. Because Jesus shows us that what matters is not just what we say, but the way we live. Amen.³

Hymn:

247 STF – I danced in the morning when the world was begun OR

377 STF – Down the mountain the river flows

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

Hymn:

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy OR

434 STF – Rock of Ages, cleft for me

Reflections on the readings

Have you ever noticed how often we ask the question, "Who gets to decide?"

Who has the authority? Who should we trust? Whose voice matters? These are not new questions, and they sit at the heart of today's Bible readings: the Israelites question Moses, the religious leaders question Jesus, Paul asks the church what kind of authority they want to imitate.

Three different stories, one common invitation.

The people of Israel are exhausted, they have escaped slavery, but freedom has not turned out to be easy. There is no water, children are crying, livestock are dying, fear begins to overwhelm hope.

They ask Moses, "Is the Lord among us or not?" It's a question that echoes through every generation: Where is God when life becomes difficult? Where is God when prayers seem unanswered? Where is God when justice comes slowly?

Sometimes churches have been quick to criticise the Israelites for their lack of faith, but perhaps we should be gentler. Thirst is real, fear is real, when people are hurting, questions are natural.

Faith is not pretending everything is fine, but is bringing our deepest questions honestly before God. Note how God does not punish the people for asking, instead, God provides water.

Again and again throughout Scripture, God seems able to cope with our doubts, perhaps we should too: our own, and other people's.

Paul's letter to the Philippians moves us in a different direction: "if there is any encouragement in Christ... be of the same mind." This is one of the most beautiful passages in the New Testament: Paul points us towards Jesus, who chooses humility over status. In a culture fascinated by power and prestige, Paul presents a very different picture of greatness.

Christ empties himself. This is not weakness, it is strength expressed through compassion. We often think authority comes from having the loudest voice, Jesus suggests it comes from having the deepest love.

Imagine how different our world might look if more of our leaders (political, religious, business or community) measured success not by influence, but by service. Imagine how different our churches might look if we asked less often, "Who is in charge?" and more often, "Who is being cared for?"

Then we arrive in the Temple. The chief priests ask Jesus, "By what authority are you doing these things?" It's an understandable question, but Jesus knows they are not really seeking understanding, they are protecting their position.

So instead of answering directly, he tells a story: a father asks two sons to work in the vineyard. One says, "No," but later goes, the other says, "Yes," but never does. It's a

wonderfully uncomfortable parable because it reminds us that faith is not measured by what we say, it's measured by how we live.

There is a temptation in every generation of the Church to confuse words with discipleship. We know the prayers, we sing the hymns, we affirm the creeds, and yes, all of these are valuable. But Jesus gently asks: what happens after the service ends? How do we treat our neighbours? How do we spend our money? Who do we include? Whose voices do we hear? How do we care for creation? How do we respond when someone asks for help?

The vineyard is not inside the Temple, it is out in the world.

There is another detail worth noticing: the first son changes his mind. That might be one of the most hopeful lines in the Gospel. We sometimes speak as though changing our minds is a sign of weakness, especially in politics or leadership. Here, this Bible story presents it as a sign of growth. Repentance, in its deepest sense, simply means turning around, seeing differently, living differently.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts of faith is that it gives us permission to keep becoming. None of us is the finished article, none of us has perfect theology, none of us loves perfectly. The question is not whether we have arrived, the question is whether we are still willing to be changed.

The people in the wilderness discover that God provides enough. Paul reminds us that Christ shows us a different way to use power. Jesus tells us that genuine faith is seen in transformed lives. Together these readings invite us to let go of appearances, to stop pretending we have everything sorted, to trust that God can meet us in our thirst, our uncertainty and even our mistakes.

And then to respond, not simply with beautiful words, but with lives shaped by humility, courage and love.

- When have you found yourself asking, "Is God really with me?" What helped you keep going?
- Paul invites us to have the mind of Christ, marked by humility and service. Where do you see that kind of leadership today? Where is it most needed?
- In Jesus' parable, the son who first refuses later changes his mind. When have you discovered that changing your mind has led you closer to truth, compassion or faith?⁴

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

317 STF – At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray.

God of the wilderness,
You hear the cries of your people,
you meet us in our thirst,
and you remain faithful even when we struggle to trust.

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

Receive now the prayers we bring,
spoken and unspoken, for ourselves, our communities, and your world.

A moment of silence.

Loving God,
we pray for your Church across the world.

Where churches have become more concerned with appearances than compassion,
renew them with the spirit of Christ.

Where communities faithfully serve their neighbours, encourage and strengthen them.

Help us to become known not for the certainty of our words, but for the generosity of our actions.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of justice,
We pray for all who hold positions of responsibility and leadership.

For governments, local councils, schools, charities, businesses, and faith communities.
Grant wisdom to those with power, integrity to those making difficult decisions, and humility to all who serve others.

May authority always be exercised with compassion, fairness, and respect for the dignity of every person.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of living water, we remember those who are thirsty today.

Those without access to clean water.

Those living in poverty.

Those whose spirits are dry with exhaustion, grief, anxiety, or loneliness.

Refresh them with hope.

Move us to work for a world where everyone's basic needs are met, and where your gifts are shared generously.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of hope,
We pray for those known personally to us who need your presence today.

For those who are ill, those awaiting treatment, those who grieve, those facing uncertainty, and those who simply need someone to walk beside them.

In a moment of quiet, we remember them before you...

A time of silence.

May they know your peace, your healing, and the companionship of your Spirit.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Finally, gracious God, as we leave this place, may we not simply say "yes" to your call, but live it.

May our words be honest, our service generous, our hearts humble, and our lives reflect the love of Christ.

We ask these prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.⁵

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

We will now take up the offering.

As we walk this road with you, O God,
We see the milestones of our discipleship lining the path.
As we draw level with the signpost that marks this day, a day that has never happened
before in all of human history, help us to learn of your love and use all that we have been
given, including these offerings, for your mission here on earth.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

345 STF – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?

Blessing

Guide my feet, O God,
That I might walk in your way.
Light my way, O God,
That I might be drawn towards all that is good and right and holy.
Call me to you, O God,
That I, and each of us gathered here today, might play our part in your Kingdom of love, in
Jesus' name,

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker