



ORDINARY 30A

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



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

439 STF – Abba, Father, let me be yours and yours alone OR

458 STF – Away with our fears

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

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

169 STF – Come, thou long-expected Jesus

Readings: Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46

Hymn:

407 STF – Hear the call of the Kingdom OR

256 STF – When I needed a neighbour

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

738 STF – There is a new heaven, there is a new earth OR

547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

Here I am to worship, O God,
Here I am to pray, to learn, to share, to listen, to read and reflect.
As I come, and connect with others here in this space,
May I be aware of your presence here with us,
And receive your grace, in worship, today

Amen.¹

Hymn:

439 STF – Abba, Father, let me be yours and yours alone OR

458 STF – Away with our fears

Opening Prayers

God, our God,
You are our dwelling place throughout eternity no matter the generation.

We thank you for the gift of life
and for those who have gone before us.

When we face change or uncertainty,
help us to trust your process and plan for us.

So that we may also remember that your work continues beyond the outwardly visible.

Lord, make us faithful and generous servants.
Keep us from seeking recognition or praise.
Give us gentle and compassionate hearts.
Above all, teach us to love you
with all our heart, soul and mind,
and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Where those around us show bitterness towards us, give us love.

Where there is loneliness in our homes and communities, give us the compassion to support,

Where there is division, help all of us to become a team of peacemakers.

And where there is need, make us willing to serve.

Give purpose to the work of our hands, O Lord,
and use our lives for your purposes.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.²

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Alice Arbon

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

I wonder if you had one opportunity to answer a question, what would you say?

For example, If I was to ask you your best film? What would you say? (*feel free to take a moment to seek responses for the congregation to call out*) or how about what is the best food? (*seek responses*) Or how about what is the best sport? (*seek responses*)

(*You could ask further questions such as best pet? Best season? Best way to serve a scone?*)

You see, all of these questions are subjective, but for some of us, the sport/scone maybe, it might provoke a stronger opinion and disagreement.

A little later on we shall be hearing about how some religious legal experts were trying, once again, to trick Jesus in giving one answer to a tricky question, and we'll see how Jesus responds in a bit.

Amen.³

Hymn:

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Hymn:

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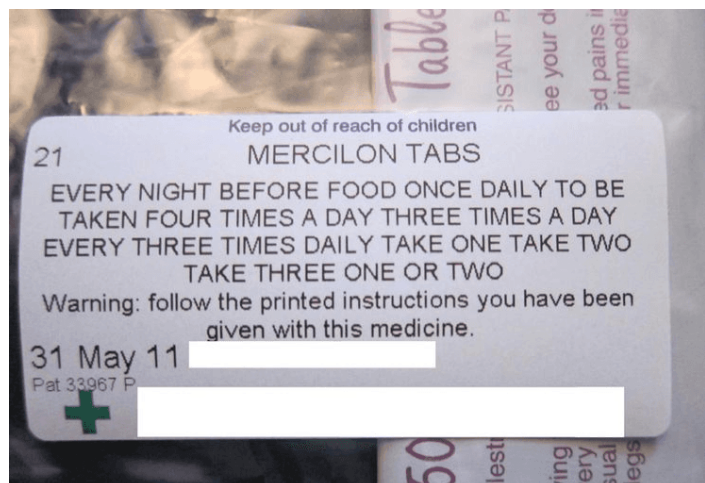
Reflections on the readings

"A child of five would understand this. Send someone to fetch a child of five." **Groucho Marx**

The following instructions were found on a real label on a real medicine bottle. I wonder if you can stay with me as I read them out loud...?

"Every night before food once daily to be taken four times a day three times a day every three times daily take one take two take three one or two."

OK – so I appreciate this is more than likely an error of an IT system gone wrong, but let's just remind ourselves



³ All Age Talk written by Mark Stennett

someone still printed this off and bothered to stick it to a bottle of tablets for some poor unsuspecting person... !

The warning at the bottom is the absolute definition of irony:

“Follow the printed instructions you have been given with this medicine”

Can you recall a time when you have been left disillusioned and confused by long-winded instructions?

An engineer called Kelly Johnson working for Lockheed providing supplies for the US Navy in the 1960's developed a theory called “KISS”. It was an acronym which stood for “Keep it Simple Stupid” This principle has stood the test of time and is used in many environments for teaching and learning to help people stay focused on the reason for a task, in a desperate attempt to keep things from becoming overcomplicated.

It is a very sound principle, and today we are thinking about over complication when it comes to our reading of scripture and the understanding and application of what our faith means to us.

Let's explore two of today's lectionary readings: the letter to the Thessalonians and firstly the Old Testament reading from the book of Leviticus.

Leviticus gets something of a bad press. So much so it is pretty much avoided when it comes to setting the lectionary readings for the year. Turns out people don't like it very much.

It is, to be fair, quite a dull book. It is filled with very many obscure regulations and rituals, and does not exactly make for a scintillating read. The other thing Leviticus is most famous for is being the source of the “clobber” verses – the bible verses that are used to justify much of the homophobic assaults that take place on behalf of the Christian church. The truth is that for every verse where you may find something condemning about one thing in life, you will find another condemning something which is a clearly acceptable part of life these days that somehow doesn't get challenged, so in my opinion a very large pinch of salt is necessary when using scripture in this way.

The extract from Leviticus that is in today's lectionary however, is a little golden nugget in the middle of all that madness. Six short verses that really pack a punch:

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18 – Acts of justice

19:1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

19:2 “Speak to all the congregation of the Israelites and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

19:15 “You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour.

19:16 “You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand idly by when the blood of your neighbour is at stake: I am the LORD.

19:17 “You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself.

19:18 “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

There you have it. Lessons in life. It can be summarised thus:

- Be fair
- Don't say nasty things about people

- Don't feel hatred
- Don't bear grudges

There is no arguing with that I'd reckon. If we can all live by those guidelines we won't be going far wrong in our human interactions. As we move amongst friend or stranger if we can apply these principles it will be nothing but positive. As we move amongst the people we like and the people we don't like, can we still apply the same principles?

Therein lies the real challenge of our faith... can we stick to this when we are dealing with the people we do not see eye to eye with?

I can see why this is the only passage in three annual cycles of lectionary readings that is deemed worthy of inclusion.

In the letter to the Thessalonians we see in these opening verses a typically wordy introduction from Paul. We might feel it is too wordy... feeling like it is going round the houses a little or saying the same thing in more than one way.

There are however five words hidden within this passage that I think provide something of an unlocking from this wordiness, and give us a clue to the simple heart of how the gospel is best and most effectively shared between us: *"but also our own selves"*

It is in the sharing of ourselves with each other that truth, integrity, compassion, tenderness and ultimately love is made manifest. Without truly being able to share our deepest selves most of our interactions remain merely on the surface. Pleasant, but not transformational. If we can be trusting enough to open ourselves up and honestly share that which is at our core, then real life development and enrichment can take place.

The ability to allow ourselves to be vulnerable around our trusted associates is crucial. Brene Brown, acclaimed theologian and researcher says:

"Vulnerability is the core of shame and fear and our struggle for worthiness, but it appears that it's also the birthplace of joy, of creativity, of belonging, of love."

So here are the simple and straight forward clues from these two readings today... behave with integrity and grace, and be prepared to be vulnerable and open ourselves up in trust and faith.

In the gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus builds on this simplicity and seems to make things even simpler through his words in response to the Pharisees' challenge. The people seemed to be craving a simple answer – "which is the greatest commandment?" they ask.

Jesus obliges with his beautiful, succinct summary: Love God, and love your neighbour". This was a summary of all that came from our Leviticus passage, and inherent in the challenge to love those around us is the call for integrity and vulnerability. I'm not sure love is truly possible without those things.

Jesus could, I suppose, be accused of complication in some of his other teachings. He tells twelve different stories about the kingdom to describe how it works, what it is, and yet at the same time never actually seems to spell it out in words of one syllable.

I think however that the accusation of obliqueness is unfair. I prefer to see this as him hinting at the very many different aspects of life in the kingdom, and it being an illustration of how amazing and difficult to truly comprehend the kingdom is, and that by giving us these glimpses this can allow us to see the kingdom in so many different realms and areas of our own life and the beauty that is inherent within. When we feel a hint or glimpse of the kingdom, we can know that it is real.

Whatever we think of that, in the passage today his ability to be simple is not in any doubt: love your neighbour. That's it.

I was reminded about the practical power of this simplicity when I recalled an interaction I had with a friend of mine in recent years.

B was an acquaintance I made while at my current job as manager of a homelessness day centre and he was the leader of the resident AA group. We would spend time sharing with each other about life, the universe, and everything, and this led to him wanting to find out more about my faith and church life.

In the end he wanted to come along to one of our services to see what it was about. He was generally very taken with the relaxed style of our contemporary worship but left with one really big problem – the words of the hymns. They were over complicated for him, and also the patriarchal nature of them was very difficult for him to take (He had had a really challenging childhood with an abusive father, and this was all too close to home for him).

We would often have conversations about the complicated nature of Christian language and also the excessive wordiness of the Bible.

I decided to give him a “Bible” as a gift. It was a tiny folded piece of scrap paper with the title “The Bible” on the front fold. When you unfolded it, it simply said on the inside one word:

“LOVE”

I told him that at the end of the day if he was struggling to understand any of it, this was all he ever needed to know. He is no longer with us, and after he died his girlfriend brought me this piece of paper back and told me it was something he treasured dearly and he had kept it in his wallet with him always.

What might you reduce the Bible to if you were trying to summarise it’s meaning and importance to someone else? Are there specific verses you might choose to focus and concentrate on?

Jesus is helping us today. He is showing us a headline to concentrate on and hold dear to keep the development of God’s kingdom here on earth on course. Love your neighbour.

So here is our lesson for today:

Keep it simple. For God’s sake, keep it simple.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

738 STF – There is a new heaven, there is a new earth OR

547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship

Prayers of intercession

Let us come before God with open hearts, minds and souls:

Lord, we pray for your Church throughout the world.

Keep us from overcomplicating the message of your love.

Help us to trust you with childlike faith,
to rest in the truth that you are our Shepherd,
and to follow you without fear or pride.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

⁴ Reflection written by Kevin Dobson

Loving God, we pray for our communities and neighbours.

Teach us to show your love in small, faithful acts:
a listening ear, a kind word, a helping hand.

Strip away anything that distracts us from loving you and loving others.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of peace, we pray for our world,
so often tangled in conflict, greed, and confusion.

Give leaders the wisdom to choose what is right over what is easy,
and help us all to seek justice with humility.

May we remember that your kingdom grows
not through power, but through grace.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, we pray for those who are burdened
by illness, by grief, by anxiety, or by doubt.

Help them to know that your love is enough,
that they do not need to earn your favour,
and that you are near to the broken-hearted.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of faith.

Keep our hearts uncluttered,
our prayers honest,
and our worship sincere.

May we walk each day in the light of your presence,
trusting that you are all we need.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Living, loving God,
Accept these gifts and bless our work,
As we seek to join in with your mission,
And build a better, safer, brighter world,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Kevin Dobson

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation

Blessing

May you go out from here, rising from this moment,
Inspired and uplifted to transform and change the world around you.
Go, with the love of God in your heart and the grace of God before you,
Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker