



ORDINARY 32A

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



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

168 STF – Come, Lord Jesus, come OR

401 STF – Come, sinners, to the gospel feast

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

405 STF – Great is the darkness that covers the earth

Readings: Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Matthew 25: 1-13

Hymn:

170 STF – Darkness like a shroud covers the earth OR

177 STF – Lo, he comes with clouds descending

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness OR

732 STF – Day of judgment! Day of wonder!

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

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.

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Call to worship

Lord, you call us to follow you,
You invite us to learn more of your way,
You challenge us to speak out for justice and peace.
Help us to hear your call today, as we worship.
In Jesus' name,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

168 STF – Come, Lord Jesus, come OR

401 STF – Come, sinners, to the gospel feast

Opening Prayers

These prayers are designed to be said by a leader and the whole congregation. If it's not possible to print or project the words for everyone, then it might be easier for them to be said by two voices, with one playing the role of 'leader' and the other of 'all'.

Leader: God of refuge,

We come to worship today bringing all that this week has been for us:
Its highs, its lows, and everything in between.

All: May all we have felt in our bones find rest in you today.

Leader: God of justice,

We come to worship bringing all that has shaken us this week:
The news we have seen, the stories we have heard, the injustices we have felt.

All: May all that has flickered in our hearts spill out in our words, deeds and contemplations.

Leader: God of hope,

We come to worship bringing all that next week might be:
Things we dream, things we have pinned so much meaning to, things we would rather not face.

All: May all that is to come be rooted in your will and vision for a world that could be possible.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Hannah Baker

All Age Talk

Throughout November, the All Age talks for The Vine have been prepared by our friends at All We Can, the Methodist Church's international development agency. Each week, we are highlighting one of All We Can's 'Extraordinary Gifts', which are a great way to do your Christmas shopping! Why not buy a gift that transforms life for someone in one of the countries where All We Can's partners are working this Christmas – find out more and order a catalogue for your church online at allwecan.org.uk/extraordinary-gifts

Today, we are focusing on Forest of the Future (*you might like to display a picture of this gift from the All We Can website, or invite people to turn to the relevant page in the gifts catalogue*).

An idea: We live in hope that Jesus is returning, Paul encourages the church not to view death like others do but to trust in Christ's return.

Does anyone here have a favourite tree? *[Give people time to answer]*

Trees outlast many of us. Does anyone know how old the oldest tree is? *[Let people guess or share facts they know about old trees]*. In California in the USA, there is a Great Basin bristlecone pine named Methuselah, it is confirmed to be 4,853 years old! That is the oldest single tree we know of, though we will keep looking!

If you have time, you might like to prepare a powerpoint of different trees for people to guess, or fruits or leaves from trees for people to guess what tree it's from (this activity works well as autumn settles in around us).

The Forest of the Future gift can help to plant trees in places where land has been cleared for agriculture, bringing back biodiversity to the local environment, encouraging the return of other wildlife and providing better air quality to combat the effects of greenhouse gases. Trees are our greatest ally in seeking to overcome the climate crisis. As Isaac, from All We Can's partner in Uganda says: 'This land was once an old forest, now it has been cleared. To start a bee farm, you need trees. I have a vision that Bukedi will be a forest again.'

Can we get on board with Isaac's dream, for Bukedi, but also everywhere?

Amen.³

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

405 STF – Great is the darkness that covers the earth

Readings: Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Matthew 25: 1-13

Hymn:

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177 STF – Lo, he comes with clouds descending

³ All Age Talk written by All We Can

Reflections on the readings

We live in times of waiting.

Waiting for an appointment. Waiting for someone to answer the phone. Waiting in a traffic jam. Waiting for change. As Christians, we might also be waiting for healing, peace, or renewal; for answers to prayer; for justice in fundamentally unjust and broken human systems.

Today's readings ask not when change will come, but how we live while we wait. How might we live as people with stories to remember; people with choices to make; people on a journey; people living out hope? This Remembrance Sunday I wonder how we might take our vocation as disciples seriously whilst remembering those we have lost, and actively waiting for God's reign, characterised by justice and peace.

Remember

As we wait, we are called to remember.

The Psalmist writes, "We will tell the next generation." What we remember, and how we remember it, is foundational to our identity as Christians. We tell remembered stories, share remembered meals and, in our remembering, we re-member. We become the Body of Christ. In remembering, we are joined to those who have gone before us, those who are beside us, and those who will come after us.

But the character of the Psalmist's remembering matters here. This is not the language of a textbook or courtroom. This is the language of the poet and worshipper: "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old". These are stories that have been carried through generations because they shape who people become.

This is the kind of remembering that seeps warmth into our bones, that makes our eyes well up, that brings goosebumps to our skin. It is memory infused with meaning.

And so today, we remember people. We remember those affected by war and conflict. We remember the human cost of violence. For some of us there are names, faces, stories and relationships attached to that remembering.

The stories we tell as we remember shape the communities we become. On Remembrance Sunday we remember not to glorify war, but to tell the truth about its cost. As we remember, how might we seek a more peaceful future? As we remember, how might we discover where God is present in the lived experiences of soldiers, civilians, chaplains, families and communities? As we remember, how might we tell a better story?

Choose

As we wait, we are called to make choices about power. Memory leads to commitment. Joshua says, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve", leading to the words that so often appear on signs and artwork in Christian homes: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua offers this choice in the context of communal memory. He tells a story of God's faithfulness before inviting the people to respond. What stories are you telling? What choices do they lead to? The choice of who to follow is a choice about values: how we will live, what kind of communities we will build, and what kind of disciples we are becoming. It is also a choice about power.

Power is not only held in governments, armies or corporations. Power is present in our vote, our voice, our relationships, our spending, our leadership, and our ability to gather with others. The choice to serve God is a choice to use that power differently. It is a choice to add our personal and collective power to God's kin(g)dom values here and now.

We often talk about service as though it means giving away power. Yet service can also mean sharing power, building power with others, and helping more people participate in shaping the world around them.

As we remember, today, our minds may be drawn to the atrocities committed when power is concentrated in too few hands. It is our responsibility, then, to choose differently. To use the agency we have in the service of God's will. To join our voices, our resources, our skills and our leadership together in the service of love.

Persist

As we wait, we are called to persist.

The bridegroom in Jesus's parable is delayed.

I have to make an admission here: I'm a bit of a gamer and sometimes in gaming – as in life – I can get distracted onto side-quests. Rather than continuing on the main storyline, I find myself collecting flowers, delivering packages, or helping somebody locate an item they mislaid three villages ago. In real life, I find myself reorganising a bookshelf instead of actually reading the book.

The thing is, side-quests are not necessarily bad. Some are useful. Some are enjoyable. But they do not move the story forward.

Sometimes when the wait feels long, Christians can become distracted by side-quests. We become consumed with things that feel urgent but are not actually drawing us deeper into God's story. We look for shortcuts, quick fixes, or distractions from the darkness. We send people away to search for oil, or we go out on a shopping trip ourselves, when we could just share the light we have together.

But God's invitation is to remain present to one another. To keep our lamps burning together. Change takes time. Relationships take time. Trust takes time. Organising takes time. Justice takes time. Meaningful change rarely begins with grand gestures. It begins with listening, relationships, persistence and local action rooted in hope.

Hope is not excitement. Hope is sustained faithfulness.

Who can you give some time to today? What relationship can you nurture? How might you share in the stories, ideas, experiences and wisdom of those around you? How might you persist with your community so that, together, you can journey towards hope?

Remember + Choose + Persist = Hope

As we wait, you see, we are called to live in hope. But not hope that ignores the realities of this world. Hope mingled with grief.

Paul is not denying the reality of death. He is pointing to another reality woven through it: the possibility of resurrection and new life. He does not tell Christians not to grieve. He tells them not to grieve as those who have no hope.

We are called to remember the story of hope: that life, love, peace and renewal remain possible because God is still at work in the world. We are called to choose how we use our power, offering our agency in the service of God's justice and love. We are called to persist together in community, resisting distractions rooted in fear and scarcity, and instead noticing the signs of new life growing among us.

We remember because lives matter. We grieve because love matters. We hope because God's love is stronger than death. Grief and hope can coexist.

On this Remembrance Sunday let's remember the cost of violence, choose the path of peace, keep our lamps burning through the long work of justice and community-building, and place our hope in the God whose love is stronger than death.

The church's calling is not simply to remember the past, but to be re-membered by God's story and to listen deeply to the stories of those around us, helping to shape a more hopeful future together.

Reflection Questions

1. Who are you remembering today, and how might you tell their story in a new way?
2. What choices do you make each week, and how might you keep power in mind as you make them in the coming days?
3. Where is God calling you to listen to voices – to borrow some light from – those you have yet to hear?

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness OR

732 STF – Day of judgment! Day of wonder!

Prayers of intercession

Response:

God of hope,

keep our lamps burning.

Let us pray.

God of hope,

in a world that often feels uncertain,
we are striving to be people who remember,
who choose, who persist, and who hope.

We remember today those who have died in war and conflict;
those whose names are recorded on memorials,
and those whose stories have been forgotten by history.

We remember those who returned carrying wounds of body, mind, and spirit.
We remember military families, chaplains, aid workers, peace builders,
and all people who bear the long consequences of violence.

We remember those whose absence is felt in our own lives today:
loved ones whose stories have shaped us,
whose love remains part of who we are.

As we remember, may we tell stories that lead to peace, compassion, and understanding.

God of hope,

keep our lamps burning.

God of justice,

You call us, like Joshua, to choose whom we will serve.

Help us to notice the choices we make each day:

⁴ Reflection written by Alex Clare-Young

the words we speak,
the money we spend,
the priorities we set,
the voices we listen to,
and the ways we use the power we hold.

Where power is abused, bring accountability.
Where power is hoarded, bring sharing.
Where people are excluded from decisions that affect their lives,
raise up communities that listen and act together.

Give courage to all who work for justice in public life,
in local communities, and within your Church.

God of hope,
keep our lamps burning.

God of faithfulness,
When the night feels long and change comes slowly,
keep us from despair.

We pray for all those waiting today:
for healing,
for reconciliation,
for secure housing,
for employment,
for freedom from poverty,
for peace in places torn apart by war.

Strengthen those who organise, campaign, volunteer, advocate, care, and serve.
Bless communities seeking to build trust across difference and division.

Teach us to persist in relationship,
to listen well, to share power generously,
and to recognise your presence in our neighbours.

God of hope,
keep our lamps burning.

God who speaks in many voices,
Open our ears to people whose experiences differ from our own.
Where we have become comfortable, disturb us gently.
Where we have become fearful, encourage us.
Where we have listened only to those who agree with us, widen our horizons.

Help us learn from those whose wisdom has been overlooked,
whose gifts have been ignored, or whose stories we have yet to hear.

May we borrow light from one another as we seek your truth together.

God of hope,
keep our lamps burning.

God of resurrection,
We thank you that grief and hope can coexist.
When we mourn, remind us that love is never wasted.
When we are discouraged, remind us that your way is still coming.
When the future feels uncertain, remind us that your love is stronger than death.

Make us a people who remember well, choose wisely,
persist faithfully, and live hopefully.

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ,
who is our light in the darkness and our hope for the future.

May it be so,

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

All around us, your goodness is flowing.

In this community, this town, this world, love is shining through in so many ways and places.

Help us to notice your goodness to us, and all that we have received.

Help us to be grateful for your many gifts, and please accept these gifts now, offered as a tokens of our wider gratitude.

May each of us play our part in bringing justice and peace to your world,

In Jesus' name

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

Go from this place, with the divine love of the Christ in your hearts,

With the inspiring hope the Spirit in your midst,

And the Creator God surrounding you with grace that knows no end.

Go in peace, and serve the Lord,

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Alex Clare-Young

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker