



EPIPHANY 4A

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

Fourth Sunday of Epiphany - Year A

1st February 2026



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

490 STF – Being of beings, God of love OR

271 STF – Come, wounded Healer, your sufferings reveal

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

264 STF – Make way, make way, for Christ the king OR

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

Readings: Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

Hymn:

665 STF – Make us your prophets, Lord OR

699 STF – God of justice, Saviour to all

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice OR

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

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace OR

287 STF – When I survey the wondrous cross

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

Lord of fresh starts and new beginnings,
At the start of this new month,
Show me how to start again, show me how to love you and follow in your way,
This and every day.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

490 STF – Being of beings, God of love OR

271 STF – Come, wounded Healer, your sufferings reveal

Opening Prayers

Let everything that has breath sing praises to God!

Let us praise God with all of ourselves.

Let our praise run through the very sinews of our bodies, pulse through our veins, flow in our lungs, for it is You, Almighty God, who blessed us with hearts to praise You!

And as we come today to praise you together, we acknowledge that we can carry the burdens of this earthly world.

[space for quiet reflection]

Loving God, thank you that we may come to You, knowing that your grace makes us whole again. We worship you in the gladness of being new people each day. Let us fill your sacred tent with righteous people. Help our walk be blameless and open our hearts to the ways you call us to be the faithful followers of Lord Jesus.

So, as we begin our time of worship, we proclaim again:

[together]

Let everything that has breath sing praises to God!

Let us praise God with all of ourselves.

Let our praise run through the very sinews of our bodies, pulse through our veins, flow in our lungs, for it is You, Almighty God, who blessed us with hearts to praise You! Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Phoebe Parkin

All Age Talk

Creative thinking challenge:

I have two questions for us today: you're welcome to think about them for yourself or chat to a neighbour. I would like you to imagine the situation that you have become a leader for the day (of a local area/country or even the world), and there are two questions for you:

I'm going to give you 2 minutes to think and talk about this first one:

1. What rule would you make?

(it can be sensible or silly, it's entirely up to you)

Before we feedback, I'm now going to ask you a second question, for 2mins again.

2. How would you encourage others to follow your new rule?

(for example what would you need to do, who would you need to speak to?)

Feedback:

With a show of hands how easy was it to make a rule?

keep your hands up if it continued to be easy – knowing that you then had to think about encouraging others?

Thank you, now are there any volunteers who are willing to share their new role and/or how they would encourage others? overall how easy or hard will it be?

(you may wish to talk about winning people over with power, with influence?)

Focus:

Today we are looking at the Beatitudes: a moment in Jesus' life where he is starting his public role, he's just stood up in front of the crowds for the first time and instead of trying to win over the powerful leaders, he is choosing to talk about God's blessing over people who are struggling, often who the world don't care for. And so from the beginning of Jesus' ministry he is showing how he is different, and how God cares for everyone: no matter what hardships they face.

Amen.³

Hymn:

264 STF – Make way, make way, for Christ the king OR

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

Readings: Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

Hymn:

665 STF – Make us your prophets, Lord OR

699 STF – God of justice, Saviour to all

³ All Age Talk written by Mark Stennett

Reflections on the readings

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 confront a community tempted to measure itself by the world's standards. Wisdom, success, and prestige often become the yardsticks we use to judge ourselves and others. Paul refuses to play by these rules. Instead, he points to a different measure, one the world frequently rejects: the cross of Christ. The message of the cross does not confirm what we already believe; it challenges how we recognise truth and overturns our assumptions. Through it, Paul reshapes our understanding of wisdom, power, and identity - not by rearranging human hierarchies, but by showing that those hierarchies are never the ultimate authority.

The Cross as God's Disruptive Wisdom

From the outset, Paul shows that the cross divides opinion. To some, it appears foolish; to others, it is the very power of God. This difference does not depend on intelligence, effort, or clever argument, but on the lens through which we see the world. The cross refuses to fit into the categories we normally trust: success, coherence, credibility. It interrupts the world's assumptions.

God's choice to act through the cross exposes the fragility of human wisdom. Paul quotes Scripture: God will "destroy the wisdom of the wise" and "frustrate the understanding of the learned." This is not a rejection of thinking or learning; God is not against knowledge. But human wisdom cannot claim ultimate authority, nor can it contain God. The world, in all its cleverness, did not come to know God.

Instead of operating within human systems, God chooses to be known in ways the world calls foolish. This overturns our assumptions about intelligence, power, and prestige. The cross becomes a place where certainty crumbles and confidence in control is exposed. Paul does not soften this truth; Christ crucified cannot be tamed, controlled, or assimilated into worldly hierarchies.

The message of the cross reminds us that God's ways are not ours. God is not bound by human rules or measures. This is good news, for it means that God's power can reach places we overlook, people we might dismiss, and situations we deem hopeless.

God's Choice and the Reversal of Human Hierarchies

Paul invites the Corinthians to reflect on their calling. God chooses what the world considers foolish, weak, lowly, and despised. This is not random or sentimental; it exposes the instability of systems that define worth by status, lineage, or achievement. By acting through those without recognised authority, God shows that human hierarchies have no ultimate legitimacy.

This is not a call to romanticise marginality. It is a reminder that no hierarchy is permanent. What looks secure and self-sustaining is fragile. When Paul speaks of "what is not," he does not mean non-existence - he means lack of worldly recognition. God chooses from places that human systems overlook, showing that calling comes from divine initiative, not human merit.

This reshapes the church's self-understanding. Identity cannot be built on comparison, achievement, or recognition. Worth does not come from titles, accolades, or the opinions of others. It emerges from participation in God's action - a God who consistently unsettles claims to superiority. The church exists not to prove itself to the world, but to respond to God's call, often in ways the world cannot understand.

God's choosing also calls us to humility. When God chooses what the world rejects, it reminds us that our judgments are provisional. We are not the ultimate arbiters of value. What seems small, weak, or insignificant may be precisely where God is at work. The cross calls us to look beyond appearances and trust God's wisdom.

Life in Christ and Boasting Only in the Lord

Paul situates everything in Christ. “He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus,” he says, and from that source flow wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. These are not trophies to display or credentials to earn. They are gifts, freely given.

Wisdom is no longer a prize to accumulate; it is Christ himself. Righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are not badges of moral or spiritual superiority - they signify dependence on God. Grounded in Christ, the community no longer competes for belonging.

Paul redirects boasting: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” Boasting is not removed; it is reoriented. It becomes a witness to God’s action, not human achievement. It reminds the community that value is received, not earned. Boasting in the Lord gives God the glory for all that is done through Christ, rather than elevating ourselves.

Imagine a small, neglected seed lying in the cracks of a pavement. By all appearances, it is powerless and insignificant. The world walks past without notice. Yet, with sunlight, water, and care, that seed can grow into a strong tree, providing shade, fruit, and life. In the same way, God chooses what the world overlooks. God works through weakness and humility to reveal true strength. The cross is the place where God plants the seemingly powerless seed, bringing life and redemption.

[Question to discuss in groups or as a whole congregation, or give people space to reflect on this in quiet and make notes].

Where in my life is God calling me to trust what the world rejects?

[After the time of reflection or conversation, bring people back together with this blessing].

May God give us eyes to see true wisdom, hearts free from boasting in ourselves, and a community shaped to witness God’s faithful power alone.

May we, like the Corinthians, learn to boast not in what we have done, but in what God has done, and continues to do, through the cross of Christ.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice OR

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

Prayers of intercession

Leader: Let us come before God, who chooses the lowly, lifts up the despised, and reveals wisdom where the world sees foolishness.

Let us pray for the Church, that it may live in the light of the cross, not seeking status, recognition, or power, but embracing humility, solidarity, and mutual care. May every voice within the Church be heard, every gift celebrated, and every member honoured for their unique contribution. May our communities of faith bear witness to God’s transforming love and model justice, mercy, and compassion for the world.

All: Hear us, O Lord, and strengthen us in your ways.

Leader: We pray for our local communities, that they may become spaces of welcome, inclusion, and care. May divisions be healed, differences respected, and those often overlooked empowered to speak and act. Grant us the courage to challenge injustice and the insight to

⁴ Reflection written by Jasmine Devadason

recognise the wisdom and strength present in the most vulnerable and humble members of society.

All: Hear us, O Lord, and strengthen us in your ways.

Leader: For our nation, that those in positions of authority may act with integrity, fairness, and compassion. May decisions be guided by justice and concern for all citizens, especially those marginalised, impoverished, or overlooked. Inspire a spirit of unity, equality, and service, so that our national life reflects God's vision of flourishing for every person.

All: Hear us, O Lord, and strengthen us in your ways.

Leader: For the world, where human systems often elevate the powerful while silencing the weak, that God's wisdom may be revealed in unexpected places and through unexpected people. May those suffering through oppression, conflict, displacement, or poverty find protection, hope, and courage. And may we, as God's people, bear witness to God's liberating love, showing that true strength is revealed in humility, compassion, and faithfulness.

All: Hear us, O Lord, and strengthen us in your ways.

Leader: For those who struggle with fear, doubt, or despair, weighed down by grief, anxiety, or uncertainty: may they encounter God's sustaining presence. Strengthen them through the example of Christ crucified, reminding us all that God's power is perfected in vulnerability, and that hope is found even in the places the world deems hopeless.

All: Hear us, O Lord, and strengthen us in your ways.

Leader: For those who proclaim the gospel, that they may speak faithfully, courageously, and without compromise, revealing God's power and wisdom in the weak and despised. May the message of the cross continue to challenge human assumptions, inspire justice, and bring life to those longing for truth and liberation.

All: Hear us, O Lord, and strengthen us in your ways.

Leader: For ourselves, that we may boast only in the Lord, trusting not in our own achievements, intelligence, or influence. May we receive God's gifts with humility, act with integrity and compassion, and bear witness to the wisdom and power of God in our homes, workplaces, communities, and nation. May our lives reflect the upside-down values of the gospel, where the last are first and the weak are honoured.

All: Hear us, O Lord, and strengthen us in your ways.

Leader: Eternal God, you choose the foolish to confound the wise, the weak to shame the strong, and the despised to reveal true wisdom. May we, in Church, community, nation, and world, live in awe of your ways, trust in your gifts, and bear witness to your transformative love, so that all glory and honour are yours alone.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Jasmine Devadason

Lord of all grace,
Thank you for all that you have given to us,
And thank you for the opportunities you give to us to help make the world a better place.
Help us to make use of the resource here, the ones we have just given and those we have access to this week and beyond.
May we use our gifts to bless you and your creation, O God.
Amen.⁶

Hymn:

707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace OR

287 STF – When I survey the wondrous cross

Blessing

Go from this place, with the peace of Christ flowing through you, out into the world around.
Go from this moment, with the radical grace of the Spirit overflowing from you, into the world and society around you.
Go from this day, with the energy of the Creator in your body, mind and soul.
Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker