

# twelvebaskets



## EPIPHANY 5A

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

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## Order of Service

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**106 STF – God, whose almighty word OR**

**60 STF – My soul rejoices in God my Saviour**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy OR**

**167 STF – Colours of day dawn into my mind**

Readings: Isaiah 58:1-9a; Psalm 112:1-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12; Matthew 5:13-20

**Hymn:**

**415 STF – The Church of Christ, in every age OR**

**504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**109 STF – In the darkness of the still night OR**

**707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart OR**

**699 STF – God of justice, Saviour to all**

Blessing

## Call to worship

As we have gathered, so Jesus is here.  
As we are connected, so the Spirit unites and inspires us.  
As we worship, so the Creator hears our voices and sings with us.  
Come, O come, Immanuel.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

106 STF – God, whose almighty word OR  
60 STF – My soul rejoices in God my Saviour

## Opening Prayers

Hush. Be still.

Rest in the House of God. You are welcome here.

Hush. Be still.

Come with all you are, the bitter and broken bits, the shining and shimmering parts, the questions and the doubts, the convictions and the certainties.

Hush. Be still.

Bow your knees in quiet humility as we confess that we worship together as a community of imperfect people. Listen to God's wisdom for new ways of being.

Hush. Be still.

Open your heart to the generous grace of God. Reach out your hands to those who are marginalised, those who are hungry, the naked, the rejected. Let us all worship together, all loved immensely by God.

And now, raise your voice! Sing the praises of our God! Let us worship You, O God! Let us be your righteous ones! Let us be Your people, steadfast and trusting!

Raise your voice in hallelujahs! Loving God, bless our time together as we come together to sing and dance and praise you! God is good, Amen!

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## We say together the Lord's Prayer

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Phoebe Parkin

## All Age Talk

*[Supplies: sweet popcorn, plain popcorn and salted popcorn – decant them into identical bowls]*

I wonder how good are you at following a recipe? Have you accidentally used the wrong ingredient – like accidentally putting in double the quantity of bicarbonate of soda into gingerbread... instead of ginger (*this actually happened*) or accidentally adding salt instead of sugar?

I'm sure you can imagine that it really changes the taste, and not always for the better.

Today I have a tasting challenge for you.

*[Depending on the size of the congregation, and/or hygiene, you can either pass bowls around, or request two or more volunteers to come forwards.]*

I would like you to put your hand up when you've had the salted popcorn.

*[invite someone to come forward and swap around the bowls, so neither you nor the congregation know which bowl has which flavour in], then invite people to taste each bowl in turn. You might find some people naturally assume the plain is salted and then correct themselves once they've tried the actual salted popcorn.*

As you can (hopefully see) the salt really does stand out. Later on today we shall be talking about being salt and light, and about standing out with our distinct flavour.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### Hymn:

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy OR

167 STF – Colours of day dawn into my mind

**Readings:** Isaiah 58:1-9a; Psalm 112:1-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12; Matthew 5:13-20

### Hymn:

415 STF – The Church of Christ, in every age OR

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day

### Reflections on the readings

At this time of year, which can sometimes be the coldest part of the winter season, do you yearn for longer, warmer days? Are you longing for a brighter tomorrow?

In this season of the Church's year we have moved from the period of preparation (Advent) to that of celebration (Christmas and the Feast of Epiphany) and now we have entered Ordinary Seasons as we await the beginning of Lent (which can be a lengthy penitential season). It all begins to sound dark, dreary, dank and, at best, humdrum.

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Mark Stennett

Back in the mists of time, life for the people of Jerusalem, those to whom Isaiah spoke, had also taken on a dismal hue. The euphoria surrounding the return to their land had dissipated and disillusionment had set in.

### The Background to Isaiah 58

We have read various sections of the Book of Isaiah throughout Advent and Christmas. The biblical book in its entirety attempts to reveal God's plan as it interprets the history of his chosen people from the time of the original Isaiah of Jerusalem through the period of the Babylonian Exile until after the Return.

The Isaiah of this section of the prophetic book is speaking to the people of Jerusalem during and after their return to the city in 539BCE. The returnees hadn't anticipated that life would be so tough. Yes, they had returned home but life wasn't joyous (as they had hoped would be the case). Surely, a holy people living in God's holy city should not be undergoing so much suffering? The city lay in ruins. Intermittent droughts caused crop failures. Life was tough. Drudgery was rife.

Despite the hardships, they are a faithful people who turn to God. It's likely that they are piously fasting. (After all, Zechariah 7.3-5 tells how for seventy years after the destruction of Jerusalem the people fasted twice a year, in the fifth and seventh months of their calendar, remembering the loss of their holy city and the fate of their King.)

### The Passage: Isaiah 58.1-12

They are fasting and praying assiduously, awaiting a response from God. The people believe that they are, genuinely, doing what is right. They are working to rebuild the city. They are fervent in their prayer and fasting and have been taught that this fasting and humbling of themselves will please God. Why is their covenant God not keeping his side of the bargain? Why are they not experiencing blessing?

Isaiah 58.1-12 can be viewed as a dialogue between God (voiced by Isaiah) and the people. The people are saying to God: "we are fasting and praying, why aren't you noticing?"

How does God (through his prophet Isaiah) respond? God tells them that they are missing the (real) point. They may be fasting and praying and carrying out religious observances but they are not actually living life aright. They only fast in order to seek attention. They only fast in order to quarrel amongst themselves.

It's the wrong kind of fasting. The 'fasting' God wants is nothing to do with minor planned food deprivation: rather it is "to loose the bonds of injustice,

to undo the straps of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?" (Is. 58.6)

(Incidentally, this isn't to say that fasting, in and of itself, is necessarily wrong. It's not a slimming diet and it cannot be used as a way of seeking God's favour but some find that it can have positive aspects and can enable spiritual insights.)

God wants His people to completely reorder their priorities, to change their lifestyle. They are to share your bread with the hungry  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (Is.58.7)

If his people embrace this whole new way of life, then their light shall shine. And, when they ask, "Where is our God in this?" He will respond, "Here I am."

This is to say, that God will make Godself known, not to those whose fasting and praying is self-seeking, but to those who seek the Lord through their service to others.

To those first hearers of Isaiah this must have been a shocking message. God is telling them that what they thought to be (orthodox) piety is not the worship that God wants. Maybe they were reminded of what the first Isaiah had taught before the Fall of Jerusalem:

learn to do good;  
seek justice;  
rescue the oppressed;  
defend the orphan;  
plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1.17)

Would that their forebears had listened! Were they, now, listening?

### How does this touch us?

The challenge is to consider whether we are truly listening to God's voice through that of Isaiah. God invites His people to live differently, to seek justice as moral agents in the world. Maybe you watch or listen to the news and feel powerless but there are surely ways in which each of us could make small differences and, together, we might do more.

Are you familiar with the hymn "Longing for Light" (StF 706)? (It may be that you sang it during Advent.) It weds together the themes of light and darkness with the challenge to address the injustices that are as present today as they were in the time of Isaiah. The hymn concludes with the line, "Let us be servants to one another, making your kingdom come." If we so ordered our lives, then we could be 'salty-servants' and light-bearers in a dank and dreary winter world.

Consider these questions:

1. We may proudly proclaim that we are a justice-seeking Church, but are we really? (How do we actively advocate for justice? Give examples)
2. How much of the time we spend in Church or Chapel is given over to worship in a style that we appreciate (and that we hope God likes too)? If our chosen place of worship opens its doors only for such worship, is it really fulfilling its mission?
3. What proportion of our time on church-owned premises is dedicated to the service of others (not just our members)?
4. When did we last have a fund-raiser NOT for Church funds but for a charity that seeks to redress the balance of our society?

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

109 STF – In the darkness of the still night OR  
707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace

### **Prayers of intercession**

Leader: Christ our Light

**Response: Make us salt and light for others, so that your Kingdom may come**

Lord, in the dank dreariness of winter we long for warmth and light.

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Wendy Kilworth-Mason

In our confusion, we turn to you.

We pray for the powerful and the influential, that they may be servants of the common good.

In a world of deep fakes and deceptions,

We seek your truth, your light, your will for us, your people.

Help us to be truly holy, set apart for you in service to others.

Christ our Light

**Make us salt and light for others, so that your Kingdom may come**

Lord, we pray for true peace, not just the absence of war.

We pray for those whose lives are threatened by warfare and aggression.

We call to mind the peoples of the places that figure all too often in our news feeds:

the people of Ukraine and Russia,

of Palestine and Israel,

of the Congo and of Sudan...

We pray for warmongers and for peacemakers

Change hearts bring your reign of peace and security for all peoples.

Enable us to speak out for peace and champion those who are victims of aggressors.

Christ our Light

**Make us salt and light for others, so that your Kingdom may come**

We pray for all farmers and food producers.

We pray for food security for those in lands where crops have failed owing to drought, flood, disease or other disaster.

Lord, in a world of plenty,

where the rich can gorge on the good things,

where some go on diets whilst others stare starvation in the face,

when, even in our own area, there are those who must choose between eating or heating,  
bless the endeavours of relief charities worldwide and those of our local foodbanks and food  
pantries.

Help us to share.

Christ our Light

**Make us salt and light for others, so that your Kingdom may come**

We give thanks for homes to go to, places where we feel warm and secure

We pray for the homeless, the rough sleepers and sofa-surfers.

We pray for those helped by homelessness charities.

We pray for those evicted by uncaring landlords

For those for whom rents on habitable properties are unaffordable.

For anyone struggling to find a place in which to live in an unfamiliar town

For all who need a new place to call home.

Inspire us to welcome newcomers and those who relocate to our communities.

Christ our Light

**Make us salt and light for others, so that your Kingdom may come**

We hold before you, Lord, all who are sick or sorrowing.

We think of loved ones lost and those who mourn them.

We pray for those undergoing or awaiting medical treatment

And for any fearing what tests will reveal.

We remember those who care at home for loved ones

Help us to reach out to all in need, in your name.

Christ our Light

**Make us salt and light for others, so that your Kingdom may come.**

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

### **We will now take up the offering.**

Thank you, O Lord, for your grace to us, and for all that you have given us in your unending love for us.

May these gifts, freely given, be used to transform this community and the wider world, keeping the story of love, light and hope alive.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart OR

699 STF – God of justice, Saviour to all

### **Blessing**

God of all grace,

As you go from this space, may you also go with God's grace in your heart,

May you know the love of God in your midst,

And may you be inspired by the Spirit, moving through the world, ahead of you, lighting the way,

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Wendy Kilworth-Mason

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker