

twelvebaskets



LENT 1A

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:

107 STF – I sing the almighty power of God OR

342 STF – All hail the power of Jesu's name!

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

334 STF – Praise to the Holiest in the height OR

657 STF – You give rest to the weary

Readings: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Hymn:

122 STF – God, whose farm is all creation OR

342 STF – All hail the power of Jesu's name!

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

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

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

440 STF – Amazing Grace OR

727 STF – God in his love for us lent us this planet

Blessing

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Call to worship

Now is the time to worship,
Now is the time to open our hearts,
Now is the time to receive God's blessing,
Now is the time to be inspired to follow the Christ again this week,
Now is the time to be attentive to what the Spirit may be calling each and every one of us to do.
Now is here, come Lord Jesus,
Amen.¹

Hymn:

107 STF – I sing the almighty power of God OR
342 STF – All hail the power of Jesu's name!

Opening Prayers

Christ, our oasis in the desert.
Christ, our anchor in the storm.
Christ our light in the darkness.
Christ our guide amidst the confusion.
Christ our Saviour in the despair.

Today, we gather to worship You.

Christ, the forgiver and redeemer, we praise You.
How wonderful that You know what it is to be in the wilderness - walk with us today and every day as we navigate our own wilderness, especially at this Lenten time.
We praise You that You overcame temptation and death, for our sake.

Christ, we sing to you in our wholeness and brokenness.
Bless us as we worship together. As we journey through Lent, help us know more of You and may our hearts be ready to be touched by the Spirit.
So, let our mouths sing joyous praise and our hearts leap in gladness as we worship You.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

[Equipment: a clock, or stop watch or stop watch on a tablet, for others to see].
How easy are we at being distracted? By the tv? By a friend or even our mobile phone?
I would like us to play a game:

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Pheobe Parkin

[Depending on your congregation, if there's a large amount of children you could invite them to play sleeping lions; but for a broader age you could invite the whole congregation, or selected volunteers to come up and play a concentrating game in front of others. The main point here is to gauge ability and to offer a game they can play over 3-4 mins.]

The game requires players to close their eyes and to hold their hand up in the air, and when I say 'go' we shall start a timer, and without help or looking you have to put your hand down when you think the 2 minutes is up. The closest person to being within 2 minutes is the winner (anyone over two minutes is automatically out). *(you may need people to adjudicate to make a note of who is the closest)*.

As you begin playing, you then begin to distract people, by saying things like 'sometimes when playing this game people are trying to count in the minds: 6 Mississippi, 5 Mississippi.. or 12, 11 Elephants, but how long is a second hey?... it can be quite distracting can't it? or, if someone walks closer to the person playing – it can feel quite unnerving, or you could even make approving or disapproving noises to really knock them off track... etc - DO NOT TOUCH ANYBODY).

Once the 2mins and 30secs have passed then see the results... ask the players whether what was said was helpful or not? Or even a distraction?

Focus: a little later on we shall hear about Jesus as soon as he's baptised, he takes time out in the wilderness and even there, in the middle of nowhere he is faced with temptations that are there to distract and cause him to stumble – and yet he trusts God, knows his Bible and protects himself from the temptations.

Amen.³

Hymn:

334 STF – Praise to the Holiest in the height OR
657 STF – You give rest to the weary

Readings: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Hymn:

122 STF – God, whose farm is all creation OR
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Reflections on the readings

"If you are the Son of God..." (Matthew 4:3)

There's a particular sharpness to that little word if.

It sounds like a question, but often it's really a test – a test of loyalty. If you belong... if you're sensible... if you want to be safe... then you'll fall in line. You'll keep quiet. You'll play the game. You'll accept the way things are, even when "the way things are" is harmful, corrupt, or dehumanising.

³ All Age Talk written by Mark Stennett

That's why Matthew's story of temptation lands so close to home. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness – and the temptations that follow aren't just about private morality. They're about what Jesus will be committed to, and what he will refuse to give his allegiance to, even under pressure.

The tempter begins with hunger: Turn these stones into bread. On the surface it looks practical. But underneath is a familiar push: Take control. Secure yourself. Do what you must to survive. It's the kind of voice that tells us the quickest fix is always the wisest one – and that we shouldn't ask too many questions about the cost, or who else pays it.

Then the voice shifts: Throw yourself down. Make it dramatic. Force a public outcome. Prove that heaven is on your side. This is the temptation of spectacle – the kind of power that needs to be seen, that wins by performance, that measures truth by impact. And we've all seen how easily that props up unhealthy systems: Believe us because we look strong. Follow us because we sound certain.

Finally, the offer is laid bare: All this I will give to you... if you bow down. This is the clearest temptation of all: alignment with the power of domination. Take the shortcut. Get the results. But pay for them by handing your loyalty to something that will distort you.

So, the thread running through this story isn't, "Prove you're worthy." It's "Prove you're loyal." Prove you'll cooperate. Prove you'll stop resisting. Because systems that harm people always want more than our silence – they want our participation.

That's why it helps to remember moments in history when people were pressed to perform that kind of loyalty.

In 1943, in Nazi Germany, a small group of students began distributing leaflets criticising Hitler's regime. They called themselves the White Rose. Sophie Scholl and her brother Hans were caught, arrested, interrogated, and put on trial. The system wasn't only punishing dissent – it was demanding conformity: repeat the slogans, prove you're on the "right" side. Sophie refused saying, "Somebody, after all, had to make a start. What we wrote and said is also believed by many others. They just don't dare express themselves as we did." She would not offer loyalty to a violent lie, and she paid with her life. Her story still asks us what we will not bow down to, even when the cost is real.

A different story, with the same shape, comes from South Africa. In 1985, Nelson Mandela had already spent more than twenty years in prison during the struggle against apartheid. The government offered him conditional release – freedom, but only if he accepted their terms. It sounded like a generous compromise, but it was really an attempt to recruit his loyalty and make resistance look unnecessary. Mandela refused saying, "I cannot sell my birthright nor am I prepared to sell the birthright of the people to be free." Not because he didn't long to be free, but because he recognised that this wasn't freedom at all. It was a bargain that would shrink justice down to what oppression was willing to permit.

Those stories help us hear what's happening in Matthew 4. Jesus refuses to let hunger, vulnerability, or ambition become the doorway through which domination takes hold. He doesn't bargain back – he refuses to play the bargaining game. He doesn't offer a compromise. He refuses the whole logic: that life can be secured by protecting self within corrupt systems and denying life to others. The way of God's reign is not easy, but it brings fullness of life to all.

So, Lent begins here – not with a demand to become impressive, or to prove worth or value, but with a question about allegiance.

Where are we being pressured to show loyalty to something we don't believe is good? Where are we being nudged towards silence, complicity, or cynicism? Where are we being offered "all this" – security, approval, an easier life – in exchange for shrinking our convictions?

Many of us won't find ourselves in positions like Sophie and Hans or Nelson Mandela – or even Jesus – but we daily make decisions that show who we are loyal to and where our allegiance lies.

So, one final gentle question: what might it look like this week to refuse one small bargain and follow the reign of God?

Not in order to be perfect – but in order to stay close to Christ, and to the reign of God that does not depend on coercion, corruption, or fear – but brings life to all.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

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

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Prayers of intercession

God of the wilderness,
when we are tested and pressured to fall in line,
hold us in love,
and teach us your way.

When we are tempted towards quick fixes, silence, or compromise,
steady us again in Christ.

Hold us in love,
and teach us your way.

We pray for your world: where lies spread and cruelty hardens.
Strengthen those who resist oppression, and protect the vulnerable.
Hold us in love,
and teach us your way.

We pray for those with power and responsibility.
Expose corruption, interrupt scapegoating, and turn hearts towards justice.
Hold us in love,
and teach us your way.

We pray for all living with scarcity and heavy burdens –
for those who are hungry, anxious, unwell, or worn down.
Provide what is needed, and make us people who share bread.
Hold us in love,
and teach us your way.

We pray for all who are pressured into silence,
and for those punished for telling the truth.
Keep them safe, and surround them with courage and care.
Hold us in love,
and teach us your way.

We pray for your Church.
Forgive our complicity, and form us for faithful love and justice.

⁴ Reflection written by Gary Hopkins

**Hold us in love,
and teach us your way.**

In quiet, we name the bargains we are being offered,
and the freedom we need...

Silence

Christ in the wilderness, keep us close to you,
choosing what gives life, again and again.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Holy God, healer and guide,
We look to you to inspire and lead us this day,
As we seek to serve you and bless the community we call home.
May these gifts be tools to help resource that divine mission,
This and every day

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

440 STF – Amazing Grace OR
727 STF – God in his love for us lent us this planet

Blessing

Grace flows from this moment, and from this space,
Grace that changes everything, even me and even you.
Go from this gathering point, to see God's grace at work in the world around you,
And take the love of Christ with you in your hearts,
I pray,
Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Gary Hopkins

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker