

# twelvebaskets



## LENT 4B

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

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **theworshipcloud.com**

**Fourth Sunday in Lent - Year B**  
10th March 2024



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**120 STF – We gladly celebrate and praise OR**

**608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**440 STF – Amazing grace – how sweet the sound OR**

**286 STF – What kind of love is this**

Readings: Numbers 21:4-9; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

**Hymn:**

**421 STF – Empty, broken, here I stand, Kyrie Eleison OR**

**380 STF – Holy breath of God, find me in this place**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**94 STF – To God be the glory, great things he has done! OR**

**397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**350 STF – I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship OR**

**610 STF – Best of all is God is with us**

Blessing

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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](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).

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## Call to worship

This is the Lord's day,  
And we open ourselves up to hear from you, Lord God.

As we pray and sing, listen and think, learn and reflect,  
We invite you to come amongst us, by your grace,  
And with your Spirit in our midst.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

120 STF – We gladly celebrate and praise OR

608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord

## Opening Prayers

*During Lent, All We Can are inviting people to ask the question 'What is Mine to Do?' Recognising that discerning where our voice and actions are most needed is a key part of justice-seeking. Each week, they are focussing on one word which represents one possible answer to that question. In Week 4 of Lent, that word is Champion. Find out more at [allwecan.org.uk/resources](http://allwecan.org.uk/resources)*

Loving God,

We praise and thank you for being our champion. The one who does not give up on us, who encourages, defends, and supports us.

Thank you for sending us your Holy Spirit, who is always with us as our advocate and through whom we can advocate for others.

Teach me, O Lord

### **What is mine to do**

Help us to champion and advocate for the oppressed and downtrodden in our world in the way that is most appropriate and effective for us. May we be mindful of the people and situations where our voice and resources are most needed.

Help us also to champion the cause of organisations who are doing vital work in bringing your Kingdom values to fruition.

Teach me, O Lord

### **What is mine to do**

Forgive us, Lord, when we are prone to self-promotion and arrogance. For the times when we champion ourselves at the expense of others. Grant us discernment to know when to use our voice, and when to let others speak.

Teach me, O Lord

### **What is mine to do**

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

Thank you, Lord, that the depth of our sin is never enough to stop you from being our champion, and that we have the chance to receive your love and forgiveness afresh today.

Teach me, O Lord

**What is mine to do**

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

*Materials needed: paper, crayons/colouring pencils*

Today, across the country, churches will be marking Mothering Sunday in a variety of ways. Some will hand out posies or other gifts, some will talk about the original meaning of the day when domestic servants would be given the day to return to their mother churches, some churches may even choose to ignore the day, avoiding the complexity of emotions around a day which focuses on mothers as they recognise the complicated relationship many people have with motherhood.

Today, we will draw on a passage from Ephesians, which we will hear later in our service, where God's gift of grace to everyone is made explicit. God's grace is for all of us regardless of age, gender, whether we've had children or not. It is a gift for all. It is God's great love that makes alive with Christ.

When do you feel most alive? What activity or moments make you feel most alive. Tell the person next to you (*or share thoughts as a whole group if that's better suited to your context*).

For some of us, doing activities that we get great joy from or exhilarate us make us feel alive. For others, it is being surrounded by loved ones or doing the job we feel called to. Laughter, companionship, purpose, all contribute to a sense of aliveness. Bizarrely, being made alive in Christ is nothing to do with what we do. It is not by works but faith. God has chosen us to be the recipients of his greatest gift.

But why? Well, this final verse tells us that we are God's handiwork and our purpose is to do good works through Jesus Christ. We are God's handiwork. Crafted and beautifully, lovingly made. If we had a mirror here, I would encourage each of you to stand before it and tell yourself that you are God's handiwork so instead let's turn to the person next to us and affirm this. You are God's handiwork! You are made as a reflection of God. You are made to do good in the world.

To celebrate being God's handiwork we are going to get our creative hats on. Now, remember that there is not such thing as bad art! We are going to take a bit of time to draw a self-portrait (just faces).

*Take however long you need to do this and then display all the faces together if possible.*

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<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by All We Can

Look at this beautiful range of faces. God's handiwork is splendid and unique. Each one of us as something to bring, some way to honour God and to bring good into the world. Take a moment to think about what good works you think God has put on your heart. What are you uniquely bringing into the church, your wider community, the world? Write it down and come and pin it up.

*Take time to read out and celebrate the different good works on display.*

Merciful God,

You bring us from death into life. You give us grace and hope. We offer you all our dreams and hopes, willingness and works, so that they may glorify you and bless others.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hymn:**

440 STF – Amazing grace – how sweet the sound OR

286 STF – What kind of love is this

**Readings:** Numbers 21:4-9; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

### **Hymn:**

421 STF – Empty, broken, here I stand, Kyrie Eleison OR

380 STF – Holy breath of God, find me in this place

### **Reflections on the readings**

When was the last time you talked to someone who seemed relentlessly negative? Don't get me wrong - I love a good moan. It's important to get our frustrations and problems off our chest from time to time. Our staff room at school is home to a number of passionate rants and raves. It's the place us teachers can go to escape the kids for a bit and have adult conversations. Some of those adult conversations are insightful, hilarious and relaxing; others are less so, but no less essential. We need those outlets to talk about the things that make us want to tear our hair out and vitally, to feel heard. If we can find someone who shares our feelings and can rant alongside us, even better.

However, there's a limit. A good rant is healthy, but we all know someone who seems to do nothing but complain. It can be extremely wearing when we encounter people who find the thorn in everything. It makes you want to scream about how things could be worse, how the silver linings are there if we only look for them, and how people are just doing their best. It's a tough balance to strike but it can be difficult not to get frustrated when someone seems determined to criticise every little thing.

There is a thread running through our Bible passages this week. Different though they are in many ways (even though our Gospel text actually references the journey of Moses and the formerly enslaved people in Numbers) they are united by a theme: the life-changing mercy and grace of God. The psalmist cries out in passionate praise to a God who gathers in the exiles, who hears the desperate call of the people who - for whatever reason - are in

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Sheila Matthews

pain and staring down death and restores them to life. In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul waxes lyrical about how the people were seemingly stuck in deepest darkness, but thanks to the mercy of God now find themselves recipients of the ultimate gift.

This passage of the Gospel according to John features perhaps the most well-known verse in the Bible: "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life". Finally, we have the text from Numbers, which paints quite a vivid picture of Moses giving out second chances to the people with whom he journeys to the Promised Land. Speaking of the challenges of the relentlessly negative, it seems like nothing is working out for this group. Moses has guided them away from the worst situation imaginable, and they are heading towards freedom. The road is long, the journey is hard, but Moses is working to provide them with everything they need. Yet, it seems as if it is not enough.

Everything comes under criticism. The manna is disgusting, the conditions are rough and there is not enough to drink. It seems the only thing missing is a cry of, "Are we there yet?" Their fear is understandable, but they appear to have lost the ability to trust in the man who helped them escape slavery and cross the Red Sea against all the odds. You can imagine Moses rolling his eyes and muttering under his breath, "What more do I have to do?!"

This Mothering Sunday, we are reminded, as we read this passage, of God the parent. God's presence in our lives gives us absolute assurance of forgiveness, restoration and hope. With God, we have a relationship that should inspire us in how we relate to those we share this world with. Parenting and parental figures can take countless forms: family; teachers; those who care and are cared for; guardians; siblings; friends. There is such joy in being able to say that we have people in our lives who worry about us, care for us, nag us a little now and then, check in on us, provide for us, and give us a soft place to land when the world gets too much. I would argue there is even greater joy in being that person for someone else, whether we are related by blood or not.

Our passages for this week remind us that, no matter what happens, we can rely on the redeeming, healing love of God the parent in our lives. They also challenge us to make room for forgiveness, restorative justice and unconditional love in our own relationships. Extreme though the events in Numbers may seem (you'll be relieved to know that my classroom management strategies don't currently include poisonous snakes!), I'm sure we can all relate in some way to the challenge of maintaining relationships, even when they are tested by mood or attitude. Moses' people are given the opportunity to recognise they've messed up and receive a second chance with no hard feelings. Can we give others that same assurance?

There is such power in knowing that we don't have to be terrified of making mistakes. By having life in all its fullness, we will stumble. We will hurt people, forget important things and act carelessly. Having this powerful relationship with God, and (in turn) people around us who embody that spirit of unconditional love, reminds us that there is always hope. When (and I do mean when) we make mistakes, all we need to do is have the humility to acknowledge them, and we find ourselves running into the outstretched arms of a God who welcomes us home with a party. May we strive to create relationships with one another that are filled with that same sense of safety. Whether those relationships are with parents, children, students, grandchildren, friends or colleagues, may we recognise the life-changing power they have for us. May we remember that a relationship based on forgiveness and renewal is not the same as one based on shame. We cannot patronise our way through a forgiving relationship. Rather than viewing forgiveness as an act of charity or a pawn in a game of power, may we view it as an act of restoration and an expression of shared humanity. May we practice the unconditional, forgiving, renewing, understanding, patient

love of a parent and may we cherish the people in our lives from whom we receive that love.

We give thanks that we worship a God whose love for us was so immeasurably vast as to give us the gift of Jesus, who made the ultimate sacrifice so that we might have eternal life. We give thanks that we worship a God so rich in grace, mercy and love, that we are inspired to share as much of it as we can with others.

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

94 STF – To God be the glory, great things he has done! OR

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free

### **Prayers of intercession**

In the stillness of this moment, we come seeking peace

We find a comfortable sitting position

We close our eyes if that's helpful to us

Or we simply sit, taking in what's around us

Our hands might be together, or gently clasped

We may hold the hand of another

Or let our hands sit, open, in our lap

We let time float on by, and spend this moment with you.

In your presence, we are free

Free to share what's on our minds.

We are free to start unravelling all the knots in our minds and in our hearts

The people we worry about, coping with illness... bereavement... loneliness... anxiety...

The situations in this world that fill us with anger, despair, a feeling of helplessness, or more questions than we can keep up with.

In the stillness of this moment, we let those thoughts unravel, and we share each of them with you:

We lay them at the foot of the cross, whether we have the words to express them or not:

You hear us

You know

You understand

You are here.

We take a moment in the silence to reflect, to share, to unload, to question and to wonder:

#### *Silence*

Loving Jesus, you take our confusing tangle of thoughts, worries and questions

You take the feeling of overwhelm which can sometimes come with experiencing and witnessing so much sorrow, discomfort, conflict and need.

May we feel you taking a seat beside us

Sharing in the pain, sorrow and discomfort

Weeping and raging with us.

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Emma Dobson

May we hear you whispering words of peace into our hearts  
Gently reminding us not to give up hope  
Encouraging us to get up when we are ready and continue on the journey  
Urging us to be peacemakers, even when the task feels gargantuan  
Enabling us to embody hope and peace in all the ways we can  
Guiding us to sow seeds of love wherever we go  
Calling us to trust that it is enough.

Lord Jesus, we pray,  
Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

Thank you Lord, for you are a God of abundant blessings,  
Thank you for all you have given to us.

Today, we return something of those blessings to you and to your service.

Lord, put these gifts and the gift of each and every one of us, to use to build a world of justice, joy and peace, in Jesus' name

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

350 STF – I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship OR

610 STF – Best of all is God is with us

### **Blessing**

Take a breath, and look around you. As you head out into this week, you might not always be surrounded by other people who are with you on this journey – but today you are. That is one of the reasons we still gather to worship – to remind each other that we are disciples together.

Take the memory of this moment and these people with you into a world in need.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Emma Dobson

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

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