

twelvebaskets



LENT 3A

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

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Lent 3 - Year A
12th March 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

34 STF – O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness OR

117 STF – Sing praise to God who reigns above

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

776 STF – In the Lord I'll be ever thankful

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Hymn:

434 STF – Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee OR

338 STF – There is a Redeemer

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky OR

742 STF – We trust the mighty love of God

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

564 STF – O thou who camest from above OR

277 STF – My song is love unknown

Blessing

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Call to worship

Come amongst us Lord, as we gather.

Open our hearts Lord, to your presence.

Use our worship Lord, to change our lives,

In Jesus' name

Amen.¹

Hymn:

34 STF – O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness OR

117 STF – Sing praise to God who reigns above

Opening Prayers

Loving God, Lord of Light,
Bringer and giver of peace,
This day we rejoice that you are our God.

This day, as we worship,
We ask that you might renew our peace, as we pause for a moment of silence as we worship you.

[Pause for around 30 seconds to a minute]

For the widow and the widower we ask for peace,
For the sick we ask for peace,
For all who feel themselves to be lost we ask for peace,
For the young we ask for peace,
For those living in broken families we ask for peace.

For each situation we have in our own lives we ask that you grant us peace in this time of worship.

In the stillness, Lord, we welcome you here.

[Pause for around 30 seconds to a minute]

Loving God, Lord of light,
Accept us, fallen as we are, bring us into your peace, Lord God.

Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

All Age Talk

Later in our service we will hear a gospel reading about a time Jesus met a woman at a well, and she helped him get water from the well to drink.

Can you tell me – has anyone ever seen a well?

Have you ever drunk from one?

[Allow congregation to share stories].

I wonder – does anyone want to tell me their favourite drink?

[Get congregation to share – take as many different ones as you can, share your own].

If it is a particularly hot day, if you've eaten some particularly spicy or salty food, if you have been exercising, or if you have simply gone too long without drinking water, you get thirsty, don't you? It can be a horrible feeling, if you go too long. Really painful and uncomfortable. The dry throat, the swollen tongue, the headaches and lack of energy.

In the story we will hear later, Jesus talks about giving a special kind of water, and that anyone who drinks it will 'never be thirsty again.' But he isn't talking about real water, he's talking about God's love for us, for all people. God's love which is a gift to us all, a gift that does not run out, that we cannot be without.

Let us pray.

Loving God, thank you for your love for us.

Help me, help us, to accept this gift again today,
Your thirst-quenching love that makes us complete.

Amen.³

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

776 STF – In the Lord I'll be ever thankful

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Hymn:

434 STF – Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee OR

338 STF – There is a Redeemer

Reflections on the reading

'Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans' (John 4:9) hits us smack in the face, a phrase included by the author of John's gospel to explain the awkwardness of the encounter. It's tempting to look down on this as part of ancient Jewish legalism as

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

though we're somehow much better - echoing the religious person in the temple, 'Thank God I am not like those people.'

Now we may not articulate it like John. There may be no group of people that we'd say, 'Oh we don't share things with them.' But, if we reflect on who we associate with, there are many groups of people that we never meet or spend time with, people we avoid, whether actively or through the ways we organise our lives. And our actions are far more telling than our words.

When we shape our lives so that we live in a bubble of people like us, we miss something of the rich diversity of God's creation and the whole of humanity. Through our lack of encounter with the Other, we lack an understanding of the depth of human experience – what's it like to be this or that kind of person in this or that situation from this or that background? And then we find ourselves othering people, looking down on them, not understanding their choices or how they live. Ultimately, if we don't know them, we cannot love our neighbour – which Jesus made clear during his time, the Samaritan, who many Jews had othered, was their neighbour.

If we're honest with ourselves, there are groups of people who we don't associate with. We may never have made the decision to avoid them, but somehow through the way we live our lives, our paths never meet, we never spend time with them, and our understanding of all the children of God is narrowed. For everyone is a child of God regardless of what we think of them or whether we make time for them.

Jesus grew up in a culture that saw Samaritans as outsiders, a people who had their own culture that had developed separately to those who had been in exile and returned. This fear of otherness created a division. Jesus, on his way from Judea to Galilee, chooses to go through Samaria, the land of the Samaritans. Anyone who has decent local knowledge would immediately think, well this isn't the most direct route. So Jesus made a decision to go through Samaria. To meet with those his culture considered outsiders, unlikely to be welcomed or offered hospitality. An interesting point, as Jesus often taught his disciples to go to places they are welcomed and stay where hospitality is offered. But he decides to take the risk.

In the midst of this journey we get a beautiful encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, at a significant site known as Jacob's well – yes, that's Jacob, the father of Joseph who had his special coat. The area is significant for both the Samaritans and for Jesus' culture – a common history. Much to the woman's surprise, Jesus begins a conversation, but more than this he asks for water. The woman is taken aback. In this simple request, years old tensions and divisions are eroded, a bridge is built and the simple encounter of two people demonstrates a common humanity.

For some of the early followers, Jesus had come to the Jews and that was where his mission ended, indeed there are parts of the gospels where Jesus affirms this as his early mission. But the beauty of God's love is that it circles ever wider. And here's where the writer of John affirms this. Jesus offers who he is and what he is giving to the Samaritan woman, a foreigner and an outsider, but also a woman, seen as second class in a patriarchal society. Jesus turns all expectations upside down and in this encounter affirms God is for all.

The conversation is incredibly interesting. As he reveals who he is, he takes an interest in her and chooses to reveal something about her. Has he gleaned it from some prophetic insight, or has he overheard local gossip? Either way, he goes straight to the detail. We wince thinking he's pulled out her deepest darkest secret in an act of judgement, but maybe that's our own lens looking down on her situation. For he offers

no criticism and we have no sense of the tone he uses. He just states it and she interprets it as a revelation of who Jesus is. It's not used to offer moral teaching, but to reveal that he is the great 'I am', the Messiah. In that moment, regardless of her past, regardless of whether we judge her for it, she is accepted by Jesus and given the hope of being born of water and spirit.

Energised, she dashes off to tell others, leaving her water jar – I wonder if Jesus was able to get his drink then? But then something even more miraculous happens: the Samaritans ask Jesus and his disciples to stay. These groups with hatred for each other break down the barriers and spend time in each other's presence, sharing in the good news of the reign of God, with water of life for all.

This is a story of deep transformation, a simple exchange at a well becomes the transformation of a whole community and deep learning for those who follow Jesus: there are no outsiders. None of us are outside God's love, however shady our past. God will sit with us at the well, knowing all we are and offering us eternal life, a drink from the deep spring of God's love. And all we are expected to do is share that joy with others – just as the Samaritan woman did with those around her.

If we are tempted to draw the circle small or find ourselves avoiding certain people, then, like Jesus, our challenge is to take a different route and place ourselves in spaces with people we may not encounter. For it is in those moments of encounter we truly experience the Other and learn of the depth of humanity and all that God is and in that we learn to draw the circle wider. For as we do, we open up the possibilities of transformation as we build bridges and discover the love of God in the midst of mutual encounter.

- Take a moment to imagine yourself at the well with Jesus, how might the conversation go?
- Are there people you avoid who you might spend some time with?⁴

Hymn:

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky OR

742 STF – We trust the mighty love of God

Prayers of intercession

Using Psalm 95 with pauses for individual prayers

Come, let's sing out loud to the LORD! Let's raise a joyful shout to the rock of our salvation! Let's come before him with thanks! Let's shout songs of joy to him!

We pray for those who struggle to sing out with joy because of the difficulties they face...

The LORD is a great God, the great king over all other gods. The earth's depths are in his hands; the mountain heights belong to him; the sea, which he made, is his along with the dry ground, which his own hands formed.

We pray for creation aware of the damage being caused by our modern lifestyles...

Come, let's worship and bow down! Let's kneel before the LORD, our maker! He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the sheep in his hands.

⁴ Reflection written by Gary Hopkins

We pray for those who are in need of care from our Great Shepherd...

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

We have received so much, and here we share from our position of relative comfort.

Enable us, O God, to use what we have, whether the gifts of money from our pockets or the gifts of our heads and hearts, for your Kingdom and your mission,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

564 STF – O thou who camest from above OR

277 STF – My song is love unknown

Blessing

We have gathered round the well, now send us away transformed.

We have gathered in your presence, now inspire us by your Spirit,
We have sung, and prayed and talked and listened, now embolden us to act,

In Jesus' name

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Gary Hopkins

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker