

# twelvebaskets



## EPIPHANY 4A

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

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **[theworshipcloud.com](http://theworshipcloud.com)**

**Epiphany 4 - Year A**  
29th January 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**17 STF – With gladness we worship OR**

**1 STF – All people that on earth do dwell**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**37 STF – You're calling us OR**

**250 STF – Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult**

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

**Hymn:**

**318 STF – Christ, our King before creation OR**

**256 STF – When I needed a neighbour, were you there?**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart OR**

**46 STF – Everlasting God**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**660 STF – Called by Christ to be disciples OR**

**465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah**

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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## **Call to worship**

We have gathered, around the mount, to hope to catch a few words of Jesus Christ.

We listen for your wisdom, today, Lord God.

Show us the way, help us to follow you, by your Spirit.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

17 STF – With gladness we worship OR

1 STF – All people that on earth do dwell

## **Opening Prayers**

As we pray, imagine what it might have been like to stand next to Jesus as he begins the Sermon on the Mount, and starts telling people about those famous words – the Beatitudes.

Let's start by closing our eyes. If you're not comfortable doing this feel free to focus on something in the room that is calming – this could be your hands or the window or even the back of someone's head.

Now, let's steady our breath.

Notice your breath entering and leaving your body through your nose or mouth. Let's invite God to work through this time of prayer:

Let us pray.

God, we know you are always with us.

We pray that you might particularly reveal your love and grace to us in this moment of quiet.

Now, imagine yourself on a hill surrounded by crowds of people turned towards Jesus, who is speaking to those gathered. You tune in to what he is saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

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

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

*[Leave gaps between the following questions and reflections:]*

As we pray, I invite you to consider,

What strikes you about what Jesus is saying?

*[Pause]*

Does any part of it speak to how you feel today?

*[Pause]*

Spend a moment in silence dwelling on any word or phrase that might have stuck out to you.

*[Pause]*

Is there anything you would like to say to Jesus in this moment? Or perhaps you feel Jesus is saying to you? In the silence, imagine yourself in conversation with the Christ.

*[Pause]*

God, thank you that you reveal yourself to us through your son, Jesus Christ, as we learn about his life through scripture, and as we enter into relationship with him through prayer.

Loving God, continue to speak to us throughout our Sunday service and throughout the coming week, we pray,

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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

### **All Age Talk**

One of the founders of the Methodist movement was John Wesley. Wesley loved to preach and teach people outdoors. Wesley wasn't the first person to do this, though. We are told through the Bible that Jesus was outside and saw a huge crowd coming to him. Seeing this vast amount of people, Jesus went up to a hillside to teach to those that were there including His friends.

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<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

He taught them a lot of things. But the first thing he taught them about was where real happiness comes from. You and I probably both have our ideas about where happiness comes from.

*[You might want to ask people what makes them happy?]*

Jesus talked about nine different things he thought real happiness comes from. He called it “blessed.” Being blessed is like getting an extra portion of joy directly from God.

There are lots in these verses, but the one I want to focus on is ‘Blessed are the peacemakers.’

A peacemaker is someone who brings peace or helps bring people who disagree together so they can heal some of the divisions between them.

Maybe at school, you have friends who can disagree and argue? Maybe you have that in your work life or family? We can often find people who disagree, and what is needed in those moments is a peacemaker.

How could you be a peacemaker in the places and spaces in which you live? What would that look like?

*[Maybe get people to take a few minutes to consider this].*

Let us pray.

Lord of peace

We ask that your peace that surpasses all understanding will engulf us

Teach us how we can be peacemakers

We pray for peace in war-torn areas of our world

May your peace reign

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

**Hymn:**

37 STF – You're calling us OR

250 STF – Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult

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

**Hymn:**

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation OR

256 STF – When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

## Reflections on the readings

We began our service by imagining what it might have been like to be on the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus began to preach, to teach, and to lead. We imagined the words of the Beatitudes washing over us. We have heard those words a couple of times now in this service, and perhaps they were already familiar to you.

These simple statements, 'blessed are...', form one of the most powerful messages in Jesus' ministry. The beatitudes change things, they challenge status quos, they demonstrate something of the radical inversion of the normal manner in which societies and communities function. The Beatitudes help to set up a world in which we no longer champion the kingdom of comfort, but forever seek after the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let's hear them again, shall we? While I'm reading them – have a think: do you have a favourite? Is there one 'blessing' that is speaking to you right now?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

*[Pause]*

Use this as a time to turn to the person sitting next to you and share your responses. Does one of these beatitudes seem more important to you? Does one speak to you today in a way it never has before? Does one (or do several of them) seem to speak into a particular challenge you are facing right now, or situation in your own life?

Use the time to have some conversation, and to listen to the voices of those sitting around you.

*[Give several minutes for conversation, and then bring people back together. If appropriate, you might like to listen to one or two of the answers.]*

I hope that was a helpful conversation, and perhaps you caught a fresh perspective from someone else as well as getting to share your own.

Dallas Willard, the American thinker and theologian, in his book *The Divine Conspiracy* talks about the radical nature of these statements, these blessings, and in particular the first one which – he says – 'changes everything'. This first beatitude: 'blessed are the poor in spirit' is, in Willard's understanding, a total and ground-breaking challenge to the meritocracy of the world we live in.

Capitalism, and indeed most aspects of Western society function on the premise that if you work hard, or work smart, or make an impact, you will be rewarded in proportion to that impact. Sadly and – as Dallas Willard goes to great lengths to point out in his book - the same is often true in the way we talk about faith and following Jesus. We say that people have been rewarded for their 'great faith' or we attempt to compare how far people are 'along their Christian journey' or – perhaps most toxically and dangerously – we say 'perhaps you didn't pray hard enough' when some a particular prayer for intercession appears to go unheeded.

But when we do that, we just conform to the ways of the world – to assuming that the Kingdom of Heaven is a meritocracy, where people ‘earn’ their place or where ‘good deeds’ or ‘strong faith’ will somehow be particularly rewarded. But, as Willard makes clear, the great ‘Divine Conspiracy’ is that actually God is opening up a whole new way of being, through Jesus. That merit is being replaced by grace. That you can’t earn your place in God’s love, God’s Kingdom, or in relationships with the divine: all that is on offer, free of charge, all the time. And we have to get away from this whole way of thinking in order to fully live in the world Jesus invites us into in his Sermon on the Mount. You don’t have to be rich, not even in faith, not even in Spirit, to enter the Kingdom of God.

Poverty is welcome here. All forms of poverty. You can’t earn your place, you can’t inherit your place. You can’t acquire your place with wheeling and dealing or clever tactics or negotiation or any of the other skills, tricks and resources that the world so often rewards. In the Kingdom of God, there is room for everyone, for all of us, and that space is there, no matter how we are feeling, how we are performing, or what we have been up to this week.

That’s what grace is. That’s what the heart of the gospel is. That’s what the message is for all of us today.

And that grace sets the framework for all the other beatitudes. All these other blessings, for people who are seeking to do good works, to show mercy, to seek peace – they will all be blessed, but not because they have earned the blessing, because this isn’t about meritocracy in the first place.

The Sermon on the Mount is an amazing invitation into a new kind of world. This sermon, which flows over the next few chapters of Matthew’s gospel, groups together much of Jesus’ key preaching, messages and ideas. These ideas have continued to shake, transform and inspire people over the last two millennia.

In the next few minutes, I invite you just to sit, in quiet, and reflect on the meditation we just heard, and on the readings from earlier in our service.

Are there words, sentences, phrases, images or thoughts that you can recall, or which come to mind during the quiet, which might be helpful to you in your developing Christian discipleship?

Are there things, which are unhelpful, difficult or need further exploration?

You might like to commit these thoughts to God in prayer.

Let us be still, and allow all that we have heard to flood over you...

*[Hold quiet for around 3 minutes].*

Loving God, thank you for your words to us. May we use them, whether we find them difficult, inspiring or challenging, to build a better world, in Jesus’ name.

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart OR

46 STF – Everlasting God

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Tim Baker

## **Prayers of intercession**

Let us pray.

When I say, 'in the daylight, in the darkness', will you reply with 'you are our constant, Lord'.

In the daylight, in the darkness; **you are our constant Lord.**

Once more we gather again; full, and weary after a week. Steady our hearts and calm our minds, so that we may find peace in this moment.

In the daylight, in the darkness; **you are our constant Lord.**

Forgive us for the times this past week where we fell short. The times where we allowed anger to be our response, rather than compassion. Where harsh words fell on ears in need of kindness. The moments where we walked on the other side, rather than help the stranger. When we placed love and light under a bushel.

In the daylight, in the darkness; **you are our constant Lord.**

Lift from us our heavy loads. The burdens of the week that just kept piling up or the tasks we've put off. The concerns we have for ourselves, our family, those around us and those we see in the street. In this moment, help us be reminded that we don't need to carry these loads alone. That we are stronger together when we help others, and that you are there to strengthen us as well.

In the daylight, in the darkness; **you are our constant Lord.**

Restore and embolden us for the coming week. Open our eyes and ears to those who need to feel the love you give, Lord. Give us the strength to take the load of their burdens, to walk with them on their journeys. Give us the courage to not hide the light and love of you under a bushel, but let it radiate onto those we encounter.

In the daylight, in the darkness; **you are our constant Lord.**

In Jesus' name we bring these, and all our prayers,

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

Lord of love, accept these, our gifts, and use them for the building of your kingdom. May we seek to align our 'mission statements' with yours, to join in with your mission to share love in a broken world.

In Jesus/ name we pray,

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

## **Hymn:**

660 STF – Called by Christ to be disciples OR

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Tim Annan-Hood

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



## **Blessing**

Go in the name of Jesus, who stands on the mount and changes the story for humanity.

Go in the name of the creator, who breathes life into all creation, even today.

Go in the name of the Spirit, moving alongside and within you, this day and forever.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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