

twelvebaskets



EPIPHANY 5A

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

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Epiphany 5 - Year A
5th February 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

109 STF – In the darkness of the still night OR

106 STF – God, whose almighty word

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

167 STF – Colours of day dawn into my mind OR

60 STF – My soul rejoices in God my Saviour

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

Hymn:

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

500 STF – Happy are they who find the grace

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

699 STF – God of justice, Saviour to all OR

415 STF – The Church of Christ, in every age

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

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

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice

Blessing

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Call to worship

The Spirit of God says 'come'.
Jesus Christ, the bride of the church, says 'come'.
Let anyone who hears this say 'come'.
Let anyone who is thirsty, thirsty for the water of life, come.
Come, all are welcome,
The Spirit of God is in this place.
Come, gracious God, and meet us as we worship you.
Come.
Amen.¹

Hymn:

109 STF – In the darkness of the still night OR
106 STF – God, whose almighty word

Opening Prayers

God of all grace, you have brought us here,
And here we are to worship.
For a moment, we have turned aside from the busyness and business of the day, to
come and meet with you.
As we sing, as we worship, as we pray and listen, talk and reflect, give and learn,
Come amongst us – by your grace,
Inspire us – by your Spirit,
Challenge us – with your love.

Show us how to go from here to play our part in forming a better, safer, kinder, more
Christ-like world.

God of all hope, you have brought us here,
And here we are to worship.
We know though, O Lord, that we have often fallen short of your glory,
We have been distracted by the things of this world and drawn away from your calling
on our lives.
Come to us now, O God, by your grace, and forgive us for all our shortcomings.
[Pause].

Even as we repent and say sorry, we know you have already forgiven us, and for that
we are truly grateful.

Thank you Lord, for this time to worship you and gather in your name,
Thank you that by your Spirit we are connected with all those worshipping, all around
the world, on this Lord's day.

We have come, come Lord Jesus. Amen.²

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

[Activity Prep: Two Flip-chart papers, pens and a blind fold].

[Ask for two volunteers to come forward who feel they can draw.]

[Explain that they will have 1 minute to draw a house and a tree, with a cloud, a sun, a flower and a stick person outside of it if they have the time. Before the first volunteer starts drawing, blindfold them].

[For the second volunteer, they have the same time to draw, but do so without being blindfolded.]

Brilliant, thank you both very much – that was a great effort.

It seems a bit unfair, doesn't it? Both being allowed to draw the same thing from the same prompt, but having limits placed on us. How often do we place limits on ourselves? Or are we told to hide a part of ourselves? Or perhaps for those who have been in the church for a long time, do we feel tired or worn out after serving within the church?

Well...we're all in this together! In fact, here's what is said in the Gospel of Matthew, which we'll come to at greater length later in our service:

[Read Matthew 5: 13-16]

We're told that we shouldn't be made to feel small, to not be put under a bowl. In fact, we should be like light in the world! We should be following the example of Jesus in our daily lives so that others may come to know God's love. And how can we all be like light? How can we remain salty?

We can help, support, and love one another. We should be lifting others up, not putting them down. We should stand up against those who try and limit each other, the people who try to hide the light.

In that spirit: Let's try drawing that house again!

[Repeat the activity, but this time allow both volunteers to draw at the same time, on the same page, both without blindfolds. The outcome should be a great looking house!]

Let us pray.

Dear God. Help us to be shining lights for you. Show us the people who need to have the bowls removed from them, and how we can support them for you.

Amen.³

Hymn:

167 STF – Colours of day dawn into my mind OR

60 STF – My soul rejoices in God my Saviour

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

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

Hymn:

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

500 STF – Happy are they who find the grace

Reflections on the readings

It's almost time for Lent to begin. Can you believe it? It barely feels like Christmas is over, and we're already getting flour and eggs from the supermarket shelves to make pancakes. Have you decided if you're going to give something up for Lent this year? Turn to your neighbour and ask them if they've decided to take on a challenge this Lent.

[Allow time for conversation].

The tradition of giving something up for Lent comes from the idea of Jesus spending 40 days in the desert, denying himself the things of everyday life to draw nearer to God as his ministry was beginning. Since then, the practice of fasting has been part of Christian tradition, as people have given up something of the luxuries – or even the essentials – of everyday life in order to focus more closely on God.

Our reading from Isaiah is particularly interested in fasting – particularly how it seemed to be going wrong for the people of Israel. It seems that the people were getting a bit fed up that even though they were giving something up through fasting – perhaps food and celebrations – they weren't getting anything from God in return. In this passage, they complain that God hasn't noticed their effort. They feel that they have worked hard to keep the rituals that form part of their religious practice, but they are not seeing the 'benefits' for themselves.

Isaiah hears these complaints, and in his response switches things up. Instead of focusing on what the people have given up – and what they feel they are missing in return - he asks them to look at what they're doing with what they already have.

Isaiah, like most of the prophets in the Old Testament, was probably speaking to people in the upper classes of society. These are people with power and influence, and with enough time and resource to fast and offer sacrifices at the temple. Isaiah calls them out for their complaint, suggesting that their obsession with observing the rituals of religion has turned them inwards, to focus only on themselves. They are more interested in what they are seen to be doing, 'bowing one's head like a reed and...lying in sackcloth and ashes', and not how their actions in everyday life are honouring God.

Even though they fast, they argue with one another. Even whilst they are seeking to honour God, they are exploiting their workers. Isaiah calls out this imbalance – in seeking to worship God the way that they think is right, they have focused on themselves and ignored the impact they are having on others across the rest of their lives.

So, Isaiah sets them a different challenge:
"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free

and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Isaiah points out all of the resources that these people have at their disposal, and challenges them to use them for God, and for the service of others. Specifically, Isaiah points out how each of them might be used to meet God’s calling for justice. What about the food they have on the table? The rooms they have in their homes? The clothes in their wardrobe, and even the tethers they bind to the people who work for them? Isaiah draws their focus away from the temple and into the everyday things of life, and asks the people how they might use these things as part of their worship.

Isaiah even matches each of these resources with a need that is present before the people, right in their community. People who are hungry, or who go without a home or the basic essentials such as clothes. In Isaiah’s calling to use what they have to meet these needs, there is also another invitation – to draw near to the people who have experience injustice and marginalisation, who need the resources many have to meet their basic needs.

In Isaiah’s vision of a different kind of fasting, we see people sharing food with one another and sheltering under the same roof. Those who have been oppressors are invited to draw near to the oppressed, to use their own hands to untie the cords that have bound them. Those with power are invited to turn away from themselves and their own priorities for reward and acknowledgement, and in offering the gifts they have at their disposal to counter injustice to come into relationship with those who have been marginalised.

Isaiah doesn’t hold back from criticising the elites in his society whose obsession with their own benefit is stopping them from noticing the injustice right in front of them – sometimes that they are even complicit in. But Isaiah’s message is not a condemnation of the people he addresses, but an exhortation – and invitation. For what is God’s response to those who use the gifts at their disposal to respond to injustice? To meet with them at the margins. “Then you will call, and the Lord will answer” Isaiah goes on to say, “you will cry for help and [God] will say: Here am I.” An echo of Moses’ commitment to respond to God’s call and stand up against injustice, God responds and stands with us in solidarity as we seek justice and peace. When we step out to the margins, offering what we have to draw nearer to those who have faced injustice, here we encounter God standing with us. If the reward of fasting is to encounter God anew, then Isaiah is telling us that in this new kind of fasting, we will encounter God amidst the people we seek to serve.

The good news is that the rallying cry in this passage is not to respond to challenges far out of our reach, but to look at what we have in our hands already. The Psalm set for today echoes this invitation too – for those who are “generous and lend freely”, God’s light will dawn. Those who have “scattered their gifts to the poor” will see their righteousness endure forever. God gives us the tools to “conduct our affairs with justice” – our job is to think carefully about how we will use them. Sometimes, this invitation requires a real and sometimes challenging evaluation of what we have to give. For many of us, the current pressures of the cost of living is stretching our resources thinly, and we might feel we have little to offer materially. Interestingly, Isaiah’s challenge does not only concern the physical things we have to give – food, warmth, shelter – but also the chains we hold onto, the burdens we carry, that only

deepen unjust relationships. Perhaps it's also about evaluating where we stand, and where our power can be used to bring about justice as well.

What do we hold in our hands today? As individuals? As a church community? Are we using it to serve ourselves and our own desire for recognition and acknowledgement, or in the pursuit of justice and peace? Lots of churches and community groups opened warm spaces this winter, heating our buildings to offer a warm welcome to those who will struggle to heat their own homes due to the rising cost of energy. Here, we have offered what we have – but are we more interested in getting people through the door and into our church, or genuinely standing in solidarity against the injustice that thousands of people cannot afford the essentials this winter?

Perhaps this is the challenge before us this Lent. Instead of thinking about what we might give up, could we consider how we might use what we already have for the building of God's kingdom? How might using what we have in our own hands to seek justice be an opportunity to be distinctive in the world?

Questions to consider:

- What is already in your hands, that you could offer in the pursuit for God's justice?
- What actions could you actively commit to this Lent to step out to the margins and encounter God anew?⁴

Hymn:

699 STF – God of justice, Saviour to all OR

415 STF – The Church of Christ, in every age

Prayers of intercession

Heavenly Father,

Jesus the Christ,

Holy Spirit,

Triune God who is one in three and three in one, we come to you to pray for ourselves, our church and our world.

We come to you yearning to be made salty and in your likeness.

Show us, here in this place, and in all the places where we are known, how to be beacons of your light so that love and compassion overflows from our heart.

This day, as we pray, we remember those who are persecuted for shining your light of love.

Healing, comforting, reviving God, we ask that you will be near to them in their struggles and watch over their lives.

We ask that you give them peace and perseverance so that they might continue in their calling.

Lord, continue to protect and watch over them.

Lord, guide all who in the church are leaders and teachers.

Lord, pour out your Spirit of unity amongst them.

Give them your shining light and might they remain salty and distinctive for your gospel.

⁴ Reflection written by the Joint Public Issues Team

Lord we pray for our nation,
We pray for the leaders that seek to govern it.
Might they be open to your church and its people.
We pray that their hearts and ears might be open.
Lord, we place them into your hands, so they may know the work of your Spirit now
and forever.

In the silence we lift those who are in our hearts who are,
grieving, rejoicing and who are not present here today,
[Pause]

You know their stories Lord, better than we know them ourselves. Be with each one of
them Lord we pray.

Lord, we lift this church to you,
Might we be beacons of light and hope as we leave this building today.
May those who we meet this week encounter the living Christ through the power of
your Spirit,

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Gracious God, we give you praise for your goodness to us. Take these gifts, and use
them in the ongoing transformation of the world, in the name of all that is good, and
right, and just and loving.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

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

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice

Blessing

Go and enter into the flow of love that is at work in the universe.
Go and discover that God is out there, moving, transforming, touching lives and all
creation.

Go and encounter the Spirit of God.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker