

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 23B

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

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**Ordinary 23 - Year B**  
8th September 2024



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him OR**

**249 STF – Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**401 STF – Come, sinners, to the gospel feast OR**

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

Readings: Psalm 125; James 2:1-10, 14-17; Mark 7:24-37

**Hymn:**

**696 STF – For the healing of the nations OR**

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

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**699 STF – God of justice, Saviour to all OR**

**636 STF – O love that wilt not let me go**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice OR**

**415 STF – The Church of Christ, in every age**

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

The kingdom of God is justice and joy – and that kingdom comes close to us today, reveals itself to us again.

Come amongst us, Holy God, as we worship and learn, listen and reflect.

Come and show us something of your creativity, and your invitation to be a part of the change we want to see in the world.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him OR

249 STF – Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love

## Opening Prayers

Today, for our opening prayers, we are going to try the signature exercise from All We Can's 'Moving the Dial' resource – an engagement with the principles of the Justice-Seeking Church report.

*Everyone stands in the middle of the room. Designate one side of the room '0' and the other side as '10'.*

*Everyone is going move to a place, somewhere between the two sides, to show your answer to the question: "on a scale of 1-10, how does our work as a church embody the practice of prayer?"*

*Ask people why they have chosen the number they have. What is already going well to get them to this number rather than a lower score?*

*Depending on the size of the group and time, you can ask the following as a whole group or in groups for 3 or 4: 'What would it look like for us to move the dial one or two notches higher?'*

*Everyone is going move to a place, somewhere between the two sides, to show your answer to the question, "on a scale of 1-10, how confident do you feel about us improving this practice within our church?"*

Again, ask a few people to comment on their score. What gives them the confidence to place themselves here rather than a lower position? i.e. why a four and not a three? Who in the church has the skills and energy to support or lead change?

Let us pray.

Loving God,

Thank you for showing us the way that prayer is part of who we are and what we do, as people of God, people seeking justice.

Show us, as we worship you today, how to learn from you, how to accept our own

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

selves, how to love you and be loved by you, and to create a world of climate justice, In Jesus' name.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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

### **All Age Talk**

Let us learn a bit more about what it means to be a Justice Seeking Church!

The Justice Seeking Church report is a series of resources from the Methodist Church, written and coordinated by Rachel Lampard, and adopted by the Methodist Conference last year. Importantly, this work doesn't replace the church's ongoing commitment to justice and peace, born out of Jesus' earthly ministry and emphasised throughout Methodist history, right up to today. Rather, this piece of work hopes to help focus and gather our justice-seeking efforts together. To provide spaces where we can share together and achieve more. To help us ask and answer the question: what is mine to do?

This is the second in a series of five worship resources produced by The Vine, exploring each of the five priorities identified by the Justice-Seeking Church work, today's theme is **Enabling a flourishing environment: right relationship between people, planet and God**. Even if you are not leading worship or using The Vine in any other capacity this month, I do recommend looking up the other four in the series, or exploring the justice-seeking church pages of the Methodist Church website so you become familiar with the other priorities.

One of the famous lines from the Psalms reads: 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it'. Everything. The whole of creation. God wants the whole world to flourish, not just us and the things that make us comfortable. Humanity is living beyond the fragile limits of our planet – hearing more and more talk of the climate crisis is just one indicator. We also know that the changes in weather patterns and the climate impact the poorest first, and hardest.

Surely this isn't justice? This isn't the world God dreams of for us...

So what is ours to do?

We can campaign – raise awareness of the impact of the climate crisis and the need to make restitution through the Loss and Damage scheme. *(Look this up online to find out more, or perhaps set a group of people to research it and share their finding with the church at the next local arrangement?)*

Action for Hope – help our church towards net zero. What do we need to do next?

Find out more about Eco-Church – a scheme by the charity A Rocha, designed to help churches become more environmentally friendly.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by All We Can - [allwecan.org.uk/practices](http://allwecan.org.uk/practices)

<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

**Hymn:**

401 STF – Come, sinners, to the gospel feast OR

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

**Readings:** Psalm 125; James 2:1-10, 14-17; Mark 7:24-37

**Hymn:**

696 STF – For the healing of the nations OR

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

**Reflections on the readings**

At the opening of our Gospel reading today we see Jesus weary and worn down, looking for rest and solitude. And yet – as often happens in the ministry of Jesus – solitude is not on the cards for him this day - there are people to be helped and healed.

A woman approaches Jesus and asks that he heals her daughter who is possessed by a demon. But not just any woman – this is a woman who by all usual practices of the day should not be approaching Jesus. She is ‘a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin’ (Mark 7:26) – somebody living outside the law of Moses. She is a woman speaking to a man without her husband present. She has a demon-possessed daughter – further alienating her from society. She is not the kind of woman one would usually expect to approach a Jewish rabbi.

Jesus is approached just at his lowest, by somebody who must seem like the last person he wants to see.

In these weekly reflections we are working through the five priorities in the Methodist Church’s Justice Seeking Church resources. The priorities of poverty, climate, refugees, discrimination and peace bring together the need for justice with Methodist action, energy and history. This week we’re focusing on the climate – the way we enable a flourishing environment, establishing right relationship between people, planet and God.

Just like Jesus in this scripture today, we can find ourselves weary in the face of climate change. The work we are called to do to campaign and take action for the environment can seem like a hopeless task. The work of God is seldom convenient for us. Talking about the climate crisis is not a 9 to 5 endeavour. Perhaps we relate to Jesus in today’s reading – just about ready for a rest when there is one more thing he needs to do to put the world to rights.

Jesus responds to the Syrophenician woman. He tells her “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” We should not miss the racial slur here that Jesus throws her way. The children and the dogs in this response would have been clear indicators of Israelites and Gentiles respectively. Jesus is telling her that the healing he can provide is first and foremost for the children of God, the people of Israel.

This is hard for us to read in a modern context. How could Jesus say such a thing? Perhaps he is quoting a Jewish saying. Perhaps he is testing the woman to see if she responds faithfully. Perhaps he is behaving exactly how we might expect a first century Jewish man to behave. Regardless, the Syrophenician woman must have felt some despair in this moment. Jesus the healer she has heard about will not heal her child.

We too might find ourselves despairing when we turn on the news, when we hear about rainforests decimated, wildfires burning, droughts and famines already affecting the poorest in the world. What is it that causes you despair?

And yet – and yet – though the work of environmentalism may feel hopeless, we are never without hope. The Syrophenician woman knows this. She is in the presence of God – she will not lose hope. The story – happily for her and her daughter - does not end in the middle of this passage.

We could get caught up trying to unpick how it is that Jesus has said such a thing, but that would be to take one verse out of context. We need to read to the end of the story.

The woman comes back at Jesus with a clever response: "'Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'" (Mark 7:28). In other words, even Gentiles might receive the healing offered to the Israelites. And Jesus tells her that the demon has left her daughter. The daughter receives the gift of healing – a gift offered to each and every one of us, regardless of our ethnicity, nationality, or background. It is here, with salvation, where the story ends.

When we look at our melting world, how easy it is to feel the despair of the mother in the middle of the story. How easy it is to feel the story has ended right in the middle – with no hope of healing, and no sign of a future. How easy it is to feel that God has turned away from us and refused our planet the healing it so desperately needs. And yet – and yet – our story is not ended. God does not abandon us. What's the end of our story?

Jesus agrees with the Syrophenician woman that God's healing power is not restricted to a chosen people. God's love knows no boundaries. So often we forget this truth. We think that God only works amongst people who look or think like us. We think that God's grace is reserved for the worthy. We forget that if God's salvation is big enough for you and me, it's big enough for the whole of humankind – perhaps even the whole universe.

In the second half of the Gospel reading, as Jesus heals the deaf and mute man in a very down-to-earth manner, we see that the healing Jesus offers people is often much bigger than simply being made physically well. The man, who was alienated from his society, is suddenly able to communicate again with others. He is restored to himself and to his community.

Just like our justice priority for this week says – we long to be in right relationship between people, planet and God. And these three are connected – the healing of our selves allows our relationships with others and with our world to be restored, too.

If the Gospel reading today, with first the story of the Syrophenician woman and her daughter, and then the story of the deaf and mute man, teaches us anything, it should teach us that we need to expand our understanding of the realm of God. Because nothing – no group of people, no mountain range, no bee hive, no galaxy – is beyond the realm of God's love and salvation.

We have learned a salvation story that is so narrow. God's salvation story encompasses the whole cosmos. We need to expand our understanding of the gospel to include all that we too easily disregard and dismiss and exclude. In the scripture today, Jesus astounds everyone by stepping outside of the expectations they had of him. If we too are astounded, then we need to expand our understanding of the reach of God's salvation. If we too struggle to believe that God loves this blue planet we call home, then we need to expand our understanding of the reach of God's salvation. We need to have a little faith, like the Syrophenician woman, that healing is within reach.

Not that we sit back and wait for God to save us from climate crisis, but that we gladly join with God in working for healing and restoration of ourselves, others, and our planet. The

transformation we see in today's Gospel stories occurs because Jesus steps out into a messy world and comes alongside people who are marginalised and excluded.

And now we are called to do the same – to come alongside our hurting neighbour, and our hurting planet, and help. Inconvenient, exhausting, and seemingly hopeless though the work often is. How might God be inviting us to join in with the work of healing and salvation for the planet?<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

699 STF – God of justice, Saviour to all OR

636 STF – O love that wilt not let me go

### **Prayers of intercession**

Living, loving God,  
Thank you that at the beginning of time, you breathed life in to creation.  
We marvel that from then until now, you have continued to dwell among us,  
Rejoicing and celebrating all that you have made.

We pray that today we might notice you in the creation around us,

Taking time to see life flourish,  
And worship you as creator God.

Call: God who lives in and with creation,

**Response: Be with us here.**

Generous God,  
There are too many ways in which we ignore how our lives limit your creation.  
For when our quick and easy choices have a lasting impact,  
When we choose us over the earth,  
And for when we have no other good choice available to us –

We are sorry.  
Would we be inspired and empowered by your love for creation  
To put life before ease, and commit to change.

Call: God who lives in and with creation,

**Response: Be with us here.**

Loving God,  
We know that changes to our climate and environment aren't just a future possibility, but a present reality for so many.

We hold before you those who live on the frontlines of the climate crisis,  
Whose lives and livelihoods have been flooded by sea level rise, crops spoilt by drought,  
families worn down by illness.

Might we weep with them, and turn towards action,  
Knowing that you call us to better living which enables all your people to thrive.

Call: God who lives in and with creation,

**Response: Be with us here.**

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

Transformational God,  
We are agents of your change, and have been called to be alongside you in the journey of renewal.

Help us not to take this calling lightly, but to speak up,

Using our voices to be part of transformation.

Helps us to see that the time is now for new life to come,

And that we can usher in your kingdom in our daily lives today.

Call: God who lives in and with creation,

**Response: Be with us here.**

We hold all of these prayers before you,  
God who created at the beginning of time,  
And continues to breathe life in us today.

Empower and embolden us to be courageous,  
That we might live for your glory in all the earth.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

God of all creation,

God who made the world,

You have given us a role to play in stewarding the natural world, in managing our relationship with the rest of creation.

Help us to use the gifts we have here, the financial gifts and the decisions we will make to help improve our stewardship, to enable the whole environment to flourish.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice OR

415 STF – The Church of Christ, in every age

### **Blessing**

Go out in peace, go out in grace, go out to seek justice and joy.

You, oh Lord, are the creator of all, including me,

Travel with us as we leave this place, carrying the fire of you – our Creator – in our hearts, always.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

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

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