

twelvebaskets



LENT 3C

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

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Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

441 STF – As Water to the Thirsty OR

578 STF – Bread of Life, Truth Eternal, broken now to set us free

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

425 STF – God of forgiveness, your people you freed OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

65 STF – Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom OR

628 STF – Faithful One, so unchanging

What am I being called to?

Hymn:

419 STF – Almighty God, we come to make confession OR

507 STF – O for a heart to praise my God

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father OR

357 STF – Jesus – the name high over all

Blessing

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Call to worship

This is the day the Lord has made;
let us rejoice in all that he has given.

Come as the hungry, to feed on his word.
Come as the thirsty, to drink of his love.
Come as the faithful, to worship the Lord.

This is the day the Lord has made;
let us rejoice in all that he has given.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

441 STF – As Water to the Thirsty OR

578 STF – Bread of Life, Truth Eternal, broken now to set us free

Opening Prayers

Gracious God,
When did I see you hungry?
I think I would remember that.

When did I see you needing clothes?
I'm sure I wouldn't forget.

When were you thirsty and I didn't give you a drink?
That doesn't sound like me.

When were you sick and in prison, and I didn't look after you?
My schedule has been pretty busy but I know that would be important.

Oh, I see. It was in the hunger of my neighbour,
The refugee family needing clothes,
The homeless man sat outside the station,
And the young person down the road caught up with a bad crowd.

Perhaps I didn't look hard enough.
Perhaps it felt like too much.
Lord, Give me a chance to look again.
I will look for the least and give my most.
I will look for your face in the faces of those around me.
I will open my heart as an invitation to you,
And beyond.
I will look around and see.
I will look around and do.

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

God of Wisdom, Hear my prayer.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Justin Bieber in 2015 brought out an album entitled 'sorry.' This album has been streamed millions of times and only helped Justin Bieber's fame increase. Now before you wonder what Justin Bieber has to do with a church service let me share you some of the lyrics of one of the songs.

Cause I just need one more shot at forgiveness

I know you know that I made those mistakes maybe once or twice

By once or twice I mean maybe a couple a hundred times

Yeah, is it too late now to say sorry?

Justin Bieber asks in this popular song a question which is fundamental to the Christian faith. Is it too late to say sorry? Well the short answer is in fact no. It is never, ever, too late to say sorry.

Jesus himself encourages us to say sorry. He encourages the listeners and watchers around him to repent. Which means 'express sincere regret'

So maybe you have done something this past week that you regret. Maybe you have said something or thought something that was harmful or upsetting. You might have even done something today before you came or logged into church.

Whatever it is, the important thing is to say sorry. Not just to the person you might have upset but it is also important to say sorry to God.

Saying sorry to God is important because it means we understand were we have done wrong and ensures that we learn from our mistakes.

Let us pray.

Lord, thank you for all you do for me. I am sorry for the times I have made mistakes and hurt those around me. Teach me to love others like you love me.

Amen.³

Hymn:

425 STF – God of forgiveness, your people you freed OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

² Opening prayers written by All We Can – from their *Let Wisdom Speak Lent* resource

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Reflections on the reading

Today is a day of uncertainty. A day of not-knowing. A day to resist easy answers and 'silver bullet' solutions.

That's what the lectionary seems to be saying, as we wrestle with difficult readings and the reminder from the prophet Isaiah that 'my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.'

Of course, we've all lived through a time of much uncertainty – and it's probably not over yet, sadly. In the midst of a pandemic, there is much 'not-knowing', there are very rarely easy answers and we certainly haven't come up with a silver-bullet solution to make the Coronavirus disappear and allow things to 'get back to normal' (whatever that means!)

So, perhaps, these readings can help us today, as we wrestle with a state of uncertainty and we look to rebuild our society, reopen our churches, reimagine our mission, transform our way of being. As Isaiah puts it, 'the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways,' but we still have to live on the earth, and to make sense of the divine calling on our earthly lives. That's not an easy task – the Old Testament prophets were wrestling with it, the Psalmists were wrestling, the Gospel writers seek to add Jesus' insights into the wrestling, Paul continues the wrestling.

Are you wrestling with the same uncertainty? Where do you look for wisdom, for inspiration and hope, as you attempt to make sense of God's plan for your life? How do you look to discern the movement of the Spirit?

[It may be helpful to have a conversation, at this point, about some of the questions in the paragraph above. You could do that in small groups, or as a whole congregation.]

Jesus often says strange things about fig trees, doesn't he? Some of the more difficult passages in the New Testament are where we are trying to wrestle with what Jesus is trying to communicate when he curses the fig tree or, in this parable, tells a strange parable about a man who asked his gardener to chop down an unfruitful fig tree, but the gardener begged (on behalf of the tree) for one more year in which to allow the tree to bear fruit.

As so often in Jesus' parables, it's not always immediately obvious who is who, and whether any of these characters are people we should seek to be like. He seems to be talking into a very specific situation about a theological issue around sacrifices and the way the Roman Empire was attempting to manipulate and control the Jewish people by interfering in their religious rituals. Jesus appears to be giving the reassurance that the Empire cannot control what is sacred, that human rule and earthly power structures cannot affect the people of God.

But he only appears to be doing so. There are other possible explanations too, and many theologians have reflected on this passage and what it might have meant for Jesus' original audience, for Luke's original audience, and for us today. The uncertainty remains. The question marks linger.

And that is a blessing for us, as a people of faith. It isn't easy for those of us who prefer certainty, who like to have a 'system', to have everything 'sorted' in our heads,

to make lists and work through them logically and clearly. But this is the miracle of the people of faith – this is the invitation, to enter into the mystery, the dance, the not-knowing.

Are you okay with that? Or are you someone who finds that difficult?

Gandalf's line from early in the *Lord of the Rings* comes to mind: 'Hobbits really are amazing: you can learn everything there is to know about them in a month, but after a 100 years, they can still surprise you'.

It's a bit like that with God. You can get to grips with the basics in an Alpha Course, or by reading a couple of books that introduce the foundations of the faith. But, the more you learn, the more you explore the way God has been at work in the world and the more you seek connection with the Spirit...the more you do all of those things, the greater the mystery, the richer the questions, the more there is to learn and discover.

That is the invitation that the characters at the end of C S Lewis' Narnia stories receive (in the final pages of the final book in that series – *The Last Battle*):

'Come further in, come further up.'

In Lewis' stories, that is what heaven will be like: where each new level is larger, richer and more wonderful than the previous one. Are you up for the journey?⁴

Hymn:

65 STF – Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom OR

628 STF – Faithful One, so unchanging

What are you being called to?

Today, we are inviting you to think about your faith. What do you put your faith in? How do you express that faith in your day-to-day life?

Faith is at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus – there is much that we cannot be certain about, and it has often been said that you can't 'think your way to belief'. At some point, you have to take the leap of faith. And you have to keep on taking it, each day.

This week, as you worship, as you work, as you eat, as you travel, as you learn, as you communicate, we simply invite you to think about the role faith plays in your journey.

What do you put your faith in? And how does that faith shape and change the way you live in the world?

Hymn:

419 STF – Almighty God, we come to make confession OR

507 STF – O for a heart to praise my God

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

Prayers of intercession

Living God, whose son Jesus conquered death and lives forever, giving us cause for hope we hold before you those places and situations in our world which seem lifeless and hopeless.

We bring before you in prayer those who farm against the odds. We pray for those whose crops, livelihoods and futures are in jeopardy through drought or flood. We pray for those who go without or have to pay inflated prices which they can ill afford in order to feed their families.

We pray, living God, pour out your life-giving Spirit.

We pray for those in positions of authority and responsibility. We pray for those who have abused those positions of power for their own gain. We pray for those who feel let down, disappointed and cynical by corrupt and abusive practices. We pray for those who feel their voice and plight is ignored by the world.

We pray, living God, pour out your life-giving Spirit.

We pray for your church. We pray that you would fill all in our churches with the vision to see where the barren parts of our church and community life might bear fruit. We pray that we would not be afraid to prune so that new growth may shoot, giving life and hope to us all and those we seek to reach.

We pray, living God, pour out your life-giving Spirit.

We pray for those whom we know who are in times of their lives which seem lifeless and hopeless.

We pray for those who are ill, or recovering from illness. We pray for those who are dying and those caring for them. We pray for those who are living with loss and grief. We pray living God, pour out your life-giving Spirit.

And we pray for ourselves. Living God we bring to you the areas of our own lives which are lacking life and hope. We bring you our anger and frustrations, we bring you our fears and our lack of courage, we bring you our anxieties and stress.

And we ask you to fill us again with your presence, peace and hope that through our prayers and our actions, relying on you to strengthen and encourage us, we might bring your light to a barren world waiting to burst into life.

We pray, living God, pour out your life-giving Spirit.

Amen.

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

Thank you Lord, for blessing us with your generous gifts – you are so good to us and as we thank you for all we have received, so we remember that all we have is a gift from you and return some of the things we hold most dear to build your kingdom.

Help us to use these gifts of money, but also our talents and skills, to bring your love, peace and hope to those who need it this week.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.⁵

Hymn:

51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father OR

357 STF – Jesus – the name high over all

Blessing

God sends us out to a hurting world
to offer the grace, healing and forgiveness
that was shown in the life of Jesus
and is confirmed by the Spirit within us.

Let us go with God.

Amen.⁶

⁵ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker