

twelvebaskets



LENT 4C

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

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Lent 4 - Year C
27th March 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

53 STF – How shall I sing that majesty OR

20 STF – Be still, for the presence of the Lord

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

55 STF – Immortal, invisible, God only wise OR

443 STF – Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

Readings: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Hymn:

426 STF - Hark my soul! It is the Lord OR

598 STF – Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

134 STF – Christ, whose glory fills the skies OR

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

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

208 STF – Let earth and heaven combine OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

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Call to worship

Let us be still and meet with the Lord,
Let us be here and open to the Spirit,
Let us be present and be transformed by the incarnate Christ.
Let us worship the God who is Trinity.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

53 STF – How shall I sing that majesty OR

20 STF – Be still, for the presence of the Lord

Opening Prayers

Lord,
Help me to sing like Mary.

Help me to be open to being your humble servant,
Willing to overcome my fears to follow you.
Help me to sing loudly of your love,
And to shout boldly about the work of your hands.
Help me to sing like Mary,
Who, although young and afraid, gives herself wholly into your keeping.
Gives herself fully and allows the spirit to work in her and through her.
Help me to have the courage of the teenage mother to persist when giving up feels easier.

'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.'
Give me a new song today.
Give me vision for what is ahead, God of Wisdom,
Hear our prayer.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Jesus, loved telling a story. He always used stories as a way of explaining amazing facts about who God is.

Luke 15 contains three different parables. Each is about something that is lost and then found again: a sheep, a coin and a son. The one which is highlighted in our readings today is about the lost son.

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can, as part of the *Let Wisdom Speak* Lent resource
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The son in this story convinced his father to give him his portion of his inheritance. He then left his father and spent all of the money living a wild life. He became so poor that he was willing to eat the food that he was feeding to pigs. Finally, he came back to his father and told him how sorry he was. His father was thrilled to forgive him.

This parable is a simple story that reveals a deeper meaning. Our Heavenly Father is like the father in the story. He is happy to forgive us when we repent and turn back to him. He forgives us completely. He “throws a party” when we return. There is even rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7).

The older brother is like the Jews who had been God’s people all along. They felt they deserved God’s love more than anyone else. We can also be like the older brother when we think that God “owes us” special favour because we have been faithful to him and done the things he has asked. In truth, none of us could do anything to deserve God’s love more.

The amazing fact is that we worship a God who is loving and caring that simply wants to embrace us with that hug that we see in the story today.³

Hymn:

55 STF – Immortal, invisible, God only wise OR
443 STF – Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

Readings: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Hymn:

426 STF - Hark my soul! It is the Lord OR
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Reflections on the reading

What are some of the words you might use to describe, or address God? For example, how might you start a prayer?

[Take some suggestions].

One of the most common titles is ‘Father God’ or ‘Heavenly Father’, or a variation on the idea of God as ‘Dad’. In this, of course, we have good company as Jesus himself referred to God as Father and therefore gave that title a special significance which helps to explain its ongoing popularity across Christian history.

I wonder how many of us have ever, or with any regularity, refer to God as ‘Mother’?

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Is that something you feel comfortable with? Is it something that challenges you or you resist?

There is a great deal of masculine language about God in the Bible and this has often been translated as the only way to understand the Creator over the years. However, feminist theology has raised the question of whether the masculine language about God belongs to a time when all generic language was masculine. Are we missing out on a fuller image of who God is by assuming God to be masculine and missing out on the feminine aspects of the divine?

On this Mothering Sunday, I wonder if it is helpful for us to think of God as mother... God as a divine being who loves us so much that this God would give everything to protect us, much like a mother might think of her infant. This same God nurtures and nurses us as we grow in our understanding of the divine and 'grow up' in our walk of faith and life. Perhaps it is helpful to think of a mother's embrace, a maternal instinct and an emotionally supportive God, as much as it is to think of a 'protector', 'head of household' or other roles traditionally played by men.

As our understanding of the interplay between the genders continues to grow, as we learn more about the social constructs of 'male' and 'female', so we also need to continue to assess and challenge the language we use for God. Is it helping us, or is it limiting our understanding of God?

One thing we can all do better is to prevent ourselves from putting limits on God. We all tend to think of God as sharing some of the characteristics we recognise as 'good' (which often means that we make God look like us). For example, if we are male, it is tempting to see God as male. If we are liberal in our politics, we expect God to be too. If we are white, the same applies.

How can we liberate God from these restrictive, human boundaries, and imagine a new kind of Kingdom that is not defined by gender-roles, skin-colour, power politics or class background? Perhaps on Mothering Sunday we can begin with addressing some of the male language we use to describe the divine.

Perhaps this same impulse is behind Paul's letter to the Corinthians – and the particular verses we focus on today: 'from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view'. The 'new creation' that comes about through Jesus Christ and his love for us transforms the way we look at the world, and moves us beyond the boundaries and restrictions we put in place. Part of the way we are taught to think, by the societies and cultures we live in, is that people are different to us – because of their gender, their race, their sexuality, their cultural background, their class, their life choices...and whilst we might try to love across those boundaries, we can't help but live within them and be constrained by them.

Jesus changes all that – and the story of the lost sheep shows the kind of radical counter-cultural thinking that Jesus embodies. What right-minded person would abandon 99 sheep in favour of one who is lost? Only someone who was not constrained by the restrictions and borders that we put on love. Only someone whose purpose was to change the rules of engagement and break down those boundaries once and for all. As Paul puts it, 'the old has gone, the new is now here'.

So, when we talk about love, and showing love for all the world, this is what we mean. A revolutionary love, a new kind of a love, a love for the whole world,

regardless of gender, regardless of boundaries and borders. Is that a world, a society, that you want to be a part of? Perhaps it starts with the words we use for God, the idea of God as mother, but it is about so much more than that, it is about living out the love of Christ Jesus in our day-to-day existence.

As Paul says: 'we implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.'⁴

Hymn:

134 STF – Christ, whose glory fills the skies OR

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

Prayers of intercession

For our prayers of intercession, let's imagine ourselves travelling around the world. You might like to think of particular people you know in some of the places of continents mentioned, or to reflect on holidays or trips you may have taken to these places. As we pray into these world issues, we will also pause to allow each of us to bring our own prayers.

Let us pray.

God of the whole world, we begin our prayers with Europe – the continent we count ourselves a part of, and a continent we have had a difficult relationship with over recent years.

Amongst the rise of some far-right parties in European countries, and fears of violence and governmental breakdown, we pray that your Spirit will come amongst those divided communities, and for love to heal the divisions of hatred.

We bring our own prayers for Europe...

[Quiet]

God of the whole world, we pray for Asia – a diverse and remarkable continent, we pray for countries with booming economies and fast-growing wealth, we pray for wisdom in the division of new resources and a commitment to continuing to serve the neediest and most vulnerable.

We pray for all those affected by conflict and tension in the Middle East, asking that your kingdom come, your will be done in Syria, in Israel/Palestine, in Yemen. We pray for communities that are excluded, marginalized or even persecuted because of race, religion or background. Bring your healing light.

We bring our own prayers for Asia...

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

[Quiet]

God of the whole world, we pray for Australasia – for the great landmass of Australia and all who live in it, and for all the countries that surround it, including New Zealand, Indonesia and the Pacific Islands.

We pray that those communities will find encouragement in their seeking for truth, that seafarers and land-lovers alike will encounter something of your remarkable truth in the natural world around them. We pray for all affected by climate change or living in coastal areas in fear of rising sea levels – help us all to recognise our role in building a better, safer world for them.

We bring our own prayers for Australasia...

[Quiet]

God of the whole world, we pray for Africa – we give thanks for the remarkable cultures and peoples of that continent, praying for resolution to ongoing tensions in countries like Zimbabwe and Sudan. We give thanks for the remarkable people All We Can is working with in countries like Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Malawi, where the resilience, courage and hope of local people are helping to transform the challenges of life in some of these places into opportunities to demonstrate your kingdom come, your will done.

We pray for the Christian church in Africa, and all religious institutions seeking to work together to build a brighter future for that continent. Let your Spirit be at work in those places, Lord of resurrection and new life.

We bring our own prayers for Africa...

[Quiet]

God of the whole world, finally we turn to the Americas – to the USA, Canada and the whole of Southern America. In these places too, there is political tension, there is the pitting of one nation against another, there is the danger of violence. We pray for the Prince of Peace to come into those situations, bringing hope, light and an outstretched hand of friendship in place of walls and weapons.

Amongst the tension, give courage to those who speak out for justice, and bring your kingdom here, O God.

We bring our own prayers for the Americas...

[Quiet]

Loving God of all the world,
We hold before you the nations
To the God who reigns over governments,
Bring justice where injustice rules.

To the God who carries a weary world without growing weak
Give strength to the struggling and hope to the hopeless.
To the creative God who dreamt up our world
Grant vision and insight to those with a heart to change things for the better.

To the compassionate God
Heal what is hurting and restore what has been broken.
With grateful hearts we thank our loving God,
whose compassion never ceases,
whose love for us never runs dry,
whose fight against injustice never relents.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

Living God, our parent and guide, we commend these gifts into your hands now. We are grateful for all you have done for us, the many blessings we have received.

Accept our money, but also our lives, energy, time and commitment – by your Spirit enable us to put these gifts to good use to bring the Kingdom closer.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

208 STF – Let earth and heaven combine OR

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling

Blessing

Let us go out and seek a better world,
Let us go with the Spirit of God in our hearts,
And show God's love to the people we meet.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession by All We Can

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker