

twelvebaskets



EPIPHANY 3A

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

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Epiphany 3 - Year A
22nd January 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

571 STF – As your family, Lord, see us here OR

395 STF – Spirit of the living God

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

683 STF – Great is our redeeming Lord OR

175 STF – Light of the world

Readings: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

Hymn:

154 STF – Come, divine Interpreter OR

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you OR

695 STF – Come, now, you blessed, eat at my table

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

727 STF – God in his love for us lent us this planet OR

706 STF – Longing for light

Blessing

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Call to worship

Come amongst us, by your grace, O Holy Spirit,
Come and inspire us to encounter you again
Come and transform us,
That we may seek to walk in your paths, to follow your way, to worship you as our
Lord and Saviour.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

571 STF – As your family, Lord, see us here OR
395 STF – Spirit of the living God

Opening Prayers

This Sunday, the Lord's day,
This day of rest,
I am waiting Lord, and we are waiting here together.

God of all grace, help me today as I am beginning again my journey with you.
I am seeking you Lord, and we are seeking you together.

God of all love, help me today as I am wanting to know more of you.
Come here, today, as we gather, by your Spirit.

Your invitation is to presence, not busy-ness,
To prayer, not stress,
To hope, not despair.
Help me to hear that call today. Help us to hear it together.

You are full of grace, O God, and you forgive us for who we are and what we've done.
I am sorry for all I have done wrong, and we are sorry together.
Thank you for your love for us, which surpasses all understanding, all failing.

Today, then, as we prepare for worship: let us pause.
Pause in the silence and let it settle on you.
Pause for longer than you think feels usual.
Pause with focus and ask God to reveal God-self in what you are to be a part of.

Pause.

Loving God, I pray that I will meet you in our time of worship and that, today, we might
meet you together.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

All Age Talk

Our New Testament reading in Matthews's gospel is like an all-action movie. Blink and you will miss something amazing!

One of the first things we read about is Jesus preaching for the first time. Though we are not told an enormous amount about this experience, Jesus was inspired to speak of God's love and light. One of the founders of Methodism John Wesley began his open-air preaching ministry in 1739 in Bristol. John Wesley would go on to preach well over 40,000 sermons in his lifetime, it is believed.

Preaching is a form of communication that Jesus used and many have used since, including John Wesley. Wesley was keen to use the tradition of preaching to share God's love in a way that would change people's lives. Often we can think that preaching is only for the few that maybe stand upfront at church. However, preaching e.g. sharing God's love, is something we can all do. It doesn't need to be in an open field like Wesley, it could be during a 1-1 conversation with a friend.

Our reading today doesn't just speak about Jesus's preaching. This action story also recalls the time when Jesus first called his disciples aka his closest friends. Jesus was by the Sea of Galilee and saw these fishermen, Peter and Andrew. Jesus says to them 'hey come and follow me' and they literally drop all that they are doing and go with Jesus. This doesn't just happen once it happens twice, as he calls James and John in the same manner.

Now you might think, why would they do such a crazy thing? Well, the last verse in our readings says: Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Jesus was literally healing people and helping those that he met. No wonder these brothers wanted to follow Jesus.

The great thing is that that same Jesus that called the brothers in the story calls us to follow him too. The question for us is will we choose to follow him too?

Amen.³

Hymn:

683 STF – Great is our redeeming Lord OR

175 STF – Light of the world

Readings: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

Hymn:

154 STF – Come, divine Interpreter OR

465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Reflections on the readings

'Those who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.'

'He said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.' The same with James and John a couple of verses later 'Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.'

One of the most striking things about these two passages from the Old and New Testaments is the power in both, one a foretelling of the other. In Isaiah, the writer prophesies God (in the person of Jesus) as a great light to those in darkness. In Matthew we see the power meeting Jesus had on people's lives: people got up and left part way through a day's work or even part way through a task. Nothing that was important before seemed important now to Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John.

The paths of their lives were changed forever, they had seen a great light. Some of us may have had experiences like this on our journey of faith where an experience of God completely changed the way in which we live, we simply cannot go on as we did before. For others the impact of our faith may have been less dramatic but still dramatic. We believe in a relational God who has transformed and is transforming each of us throughout our life of faith.

But sometimes I fear we lose sight of this in the mundanities of day-to-day life and certainly the mundanities of church life: who is doing the refreshments this week? Have we got someone to do the readings?

I would never suggest these are unimportant, these are the tasks that keep the worship going but we must keep our mind on the bigger picture, the grounding reason we are all here: our relationship with a God of love.

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul chastises his readers for the divisions they have created within their church community: they were arguing about whether they belonged to Paul or Apollos or Cephas or Christ. Paul asks them 'Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you?'

This is the beginning of 4 chapters at the start of 1 Corinthians where Paul gives them a good telling off for the various divisions they have created. He's challenging them to focus on unity and sharing the good news, what is truly important. I wonder what Paul would think of Christianity in Britain today with so many denominations and different Christian identities? Would he think we had lost sight of what was important? Or would he think our reasons for division were justifiable?

I'll leave you to work that one out.

For many people who do not have a faith, much of what has divided the church would seem irrelevant: women in leadership, meaning of marriage, worship style. Not that our theology on these is unimportant, how we read and understand the Bible has an impact on the way we understand the world we live in and our place within it. But, our divisions do suggest we still have a way to go to become the united body of Christ.

This feels particularly challenging not only in our churches but also in our society, which feels at least as divided as it ever has, if not more so. The thing that scares me most about the political and ideological differences of the last few years is less the impact of the policies suggested but the power it has to turn family member against family member and neighbour against neighbour.

I cannot remember a time when people were building such clear barriers and speaking of others with so little respect and regard. Based on the challenge from Paul in 1

Corinthians and the radical way Jesus lived his life, bringing radical love and challenging the barriers we build, I want to leave each of you with a challenge to take out into the week. As you chat over tea and coffee and then leave church going into your week, I challenge you to remember that Jesus came and lived amongst us so those who walked in darkness would see a great light. We can all be that great light to all we meet this week when we focus on what we share rather than what divides us.

[Pause].

In light of all we have heard, let's take a few minutes, break into small groups *[if necessary]* of around 3 or 4, and think about the following three questions:

Who are the people you find it hardest to see beyond the differences?

What barriers do you build?

How can you do something about those barriers and prejudices?

[After you have given people time to discuss, invite people to come back together, pause for a moment in quiet, then offer up this short prayer together.]

Loving God, thank you that you accept us just as we are. May we become more accepting, more loving, more forgiving people, the people of a great light,

In Jesus' name,

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you OR

695 STF – Come, now, you blessed, eat at my table

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray.

It's us God. We've made it through another week, and we wanted to check in. But first; Thank you for helping us through another 7 days.

We've faced some hard days and seen harsh things. New stories from around the world, of people seeing and using others as resources, not as humans with value and emotions. Of senseless wars and those who defend themselves and try and protect their loved ones.

We see the people who are struggling with feeding their families, keeping warm, and trying to survive day to day; but we are aware of those whose struggle we don't know about. Encourage us, embolden us, so that we can face these horrors and support those who have no choice but to face them.

In all these horrors though, uncover the beauty around us. To hear the laughter of the child in the supermarket. The smile from the stranger as we walk past them. Our favourite song appearing on the radio while stuck in traffic. The smell of coffee as we wait for friends. Nudge us towards these moments and may we be thankful for them.

In all these things, may we be blessed for a roof over our heads, food on our table, a community to love us, and joy in our hearts. As we are blessed, may we become a blessing to others.

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

In your name we pray

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Lord of all the earth, accept these gifts. We who give them, know we have so much still to offer – so much of our time, our energy, our commitment, our ideas and our strength. What we have left, what we choose to call ours, we commit to you again this day,

In Jesus' name,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

727 STF – God in his love for us lent us this planet OR

706 STF – Longing for light

Blessing

God of all grace, may we go from this place, to seek a world of wholeness, a world of harmony, a world where your grace is revealed to all people in all places.

Empower us, by your Spirit.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Annan-Hood

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker