

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 17A

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

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**Ordinary 17 - Year A**  
30th July 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**654 STF – The love of God comes close where stands an open door OR**

**68 STF – Worship God with the morning sunrise**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God OR**

**408 STF – How small a spark has lit a living fire!**

Readings: Genesis 29:15-28; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

**Hymn:**

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

**650 STF – Heal us, Immanuel! Hear our prayer**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**610 STF – Best of all is God is with us OR**

**693 STF – Beauty for brokenness**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

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

**699 STF – God of justice**

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

Grace is here to welcome us,  
Christ is here amongst us,  
The Spirit moves by ways we do not know,  
And God comes close, closer than we can imagine.

Come close, Lord Jesus, close enough that we can feel your breath on our cheeks, as we worship you.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

654 STF – The love of God comes close where stands an open door OR

68 STF – Worship God with the morning sunrise

## Opening Prayers

Lord of light, we come to encounter you.

We invite you to come and shine in our hearts, to transform us by your love and your grace, that our faces might shine with your glory, that your love might be seen in our eye-contact, our gentle smile, our encouraging nod, our warm embrace.

We come to worship, not because you need our worship, but because we need to worship you.

Lord of light, come amongst us by your grace.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

For our prayers of thanksgiving, we are inviting us all to share something we are thankful for. Each of us have received so much and, no matter how we feel right now, there is something we can be thankful for. Let's just take a few moments now to share those - what are you thankful for this morning?

*[Give people time to share and encourage other responses].*

Living God, for all we have heard, for all the thanks offered out loud; and those we have thought of but perhaps not had chance to share, we are truly thankful. You, O Lord, are the provider of blessings and giver of gifts. We are your thankful people.

And despite all you have done for us, despite all we have received, we have failed you and fallen short of your desires for our lives. We have stood with the apostle Paul when we have done and said the things we wish we hadn't, and regret the missed opportunities to do and say the things we wish we had.

We'll hold a moment of quiet now, in which you are invited to reflect on your mistakes and regrets from this past week, offering them to God in prayer.

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

*[Hold quiet for a minute or two]*

Living God, you accept us just as we are, you welcome us into your presence, no matter what we have done or how we have let you down. Thank you for your forgiveness for us and for continuing to use us for your glory.

We bring all our prayers in the name of the Creator God, the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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

### **All Age Talk**

*[Resources you need in advance: a ball of wool, a toy car or driving L plate, a pair of trainers (or pictures of all these things).]*

*[Holding up the ball of wool]:* Who among us knows how to knit or crochet? How long have you been able to do that?

*Gather responses. Work out who has been doing this the longest and invite them up to the front to hold the ball of wool (or hold it aloft from their seat).*

*Holding the toy car/L plate:* Who among us can drive? Who took more than one test? Who had the most lessons to learn?

*Whoever took the longest to get their licence can be invited up to the front to hold their object (e.g. L plates)*

*Holding a pair of trainers:* Who is able to (and enjoys) running? Have any of you ever run any longer distances? 5km? 10km? Has anyone ever run a marathon?

*Whoever has run the longest distance can be invited up to the front to hold the trainers.*

What do these activities have in common? Knitting, driving, long-distance running?  
*Gather responses from the congregation.*

All of these skills took time to learn and develop. You cannot pick up a crochet hook and suddenly be able to make a blanket. You need to begin by learning the basic stitches and then progressing to putting them together before you can advance to following a pattern. You cannot change this ball of wool into something beautiful without effort and time.

It would be brilliant if we could wake up with the knowledge and skills to drive a car but sadly we cannot. We have to take lessons and learn the different functions and practice (a lot). It is a weekly or daily commitment to learn those skills. We cannot change these L plates for a proper licence without committing time and effort.

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<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

You hear about people who turn up to run a half marathon or marathon without any practice or training, and those stories rarely end well. Our bodies need training to be able to compete and endure. When you sign up to run a long distance race, you will need to make a running plan: a schedule of how you will begin and get to the finish line. You start with small distances and build up until the big day. To change and develop our bodies until they can survive running for long distances takes committing the time and effort.

All of these activities require the same things. What are they? Time and effort. Later in our bible readings, we will hear about Jesus' parables about little things that, with time and effort, can fulfil their potential. That's a lot like the work All We Can is involved in around the world.

What is God calling you to change in your own life? What will require time and effort for you? Each of these people standing here have done something extraordinary. They committed to learning new skills and putting them into practice.

What are you being called to commit to? How can you be involved in long-term change in your community or the world?

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

**Hymn:**

254 STF – Seek ye first the kingdom of God OR

408 STF – How small a spark has lit a living fire!

**Readings:** Genesis 29:15-28; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

**Hymn:**

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

650 STF – Heal us, Immanuel! Hear our prayer

**Reflections on the readings**

All We Can is the international development charity of the Methodist Church, and one of the partner organisations with Twelvebaskets, contributing to The Vine resources that we are using in our service today. All We Can works around the world, helping people to tackle the poverty they face and with the vision statement of 'every person's potential fulfilled.'

This year, All We Can is running a campaign called 'Communities in the Driving Seat', which is an invitation to think about how we can shift the power when it comes to how we think about poverty (especially in relation to the communities in Africa where much of All We Can's work happens), but also a challenge to us to think again about how we operate as churches in the communities where we live and have our presence. Do we try to take control, or are we able to wait, to listen, to accept that movement may be

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by All We Can

slower but more transformative. That's what we have already been reflecting on in our service today: real change often takes time, and effort. But it is worth the investment. Quick-fixes often end up excluding people or leaving them behind. The long-term solution requires much more energy, and can be frustrating, but that's how we are going to bring about change.

I invite you to think about a tandem bike for a moment. Has anyone ever ridden one? Or even got one? *[Give people a moment to share any tandem stories they might have].*

This is an analogy that All We Can have been using at events and services up and down the country this year, inviting people to think about whether they would like to get on the back seat, or the front seat of the tandem. On the back, you can lend a bit of extra power, and if you don't move in sync with the other rider you can destabilise the whole thing – but you have to let go of control. On the front, you are able to steer and to take control, as long as the other rider is being helpful! This is like the work All We Can is doing around the world where they are resisting the temptation to jump on the front seat of the tandem in the communities in Malawi, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and other countries where they are working. They are trying to let go the control, so the local community can be in the driving seat, and help to create space for change.

Let's watch this video, to help explain how this works in Malawi: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fncGaj\\_rhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fncGaj_rhA)

*[If you don't have the option to watch the video, you could watch it in advance, suggest others watch it at home, and just pull out a couple of the key quotes from Victor: 'everything local is sustainable' and 'development should be a conversation', for example.]*

In today's gospel readings, we hear some of the parables Jesus uses to explain the nature of the kingdom of God. And these parables help us recognise a gospel message that runs counter to the power-games and control-narratives of this world. This is a story that is about mustard seeds and yeast: tiny things that have a huge impact, with time and effort. Victor, the head of All We Can's partner from Eagles, talks about the potential he sees in the communities in Malawi where he serves, but he recognizes they 'need a push from the outside – it's partnership'. This is the gospel message: not a grand-scale takeover, but a gentle nudge. Not a forest, but a seed. Not a banquet, but a few grains of yeast.

In the spirit of 'communities in the driving seat', rather than hearing lots of words from the front today, let's create a space for some conversation about our community and how we can listen to the voices of the people who live here, and the work of God in this community.

First, let's hold a moment of stillness and, in the quiet, I invite you to picture the few roads around where you are now: the houses, the shops, the people who live and work and travel there. In the stillness, just hold those places and people in prayer.

*[Quiet for 3 or 4 minutes].*

Next, let's break into groups of 3 or 4 where you are sitting, and have a conversation around these questions:

1. What is happening in this community that the church or church people are already involved in / supporting?
2. What is happening in this community that we could be more involved in?
3. What would praying intentionally for this community look like?

*[Give people space to have this conversation. If its helpful and your church congregation will be comfortable with this, why not come back together again at the end and get people to feedback. You might like to make some notes and pick them up in conversation with your minister or at an upcoming meeting where relevant].*

This kind of conversation is the one All We Can is having all around the world, in places affected by poverty, natural and human-caused disasters, and impacted by the rising tide of the climate crisis. And it is in the conversation that development happens; not that solutions are imposed from the outside or from the top-down, but they are shared, developed and owned by local people in local communities in local situations. As Victor would say: the local people have a PHD in their local community.

You can find out more about All We Can's work, and get involved in the conversation to change the way we think about poverty at [allwecan.org.uk/drivingseat](http://allwecan.org.uk/drivingseat) – or by finding All We Can on social media. If you feel able to support their work with a regular donation, take a look at the website or get in touch with the team to sign up and help rethink poverty.

But, even more importantly than that, we can all learn something from All We Can's principles around community engagement. These are gospel principles of how to apply Jesus' parables today. The parables of smallness, of taking time, of listening, of letting go power and control in order to join in with the work of the Kingdom. As we do that, we discover that the Kingdom is smaller, more subversive and totally uninterested in social status. We discover something more loving, more alive, and more grace-filled than we can comprehend, and it changes everything.

Are you ready to be a part of the quiet revolution? The listening movement? To let go the handlebars, and put God in the driving seat?

Jump on board, it's about to get exciting!

Let us pray.

Loving God,

There is so much that is not right with your world,

And yet we know that the best solution isn't always for us to jump in and try to fix it.

Help us to listen, help us to learn, help us to discern the work you have called us to do, and the things you are challenging us to let go of.

Help us to do all that we can, all that is ours to do, and to let you – and the people in the communities we serve – be in the driving seat.

Inspire us, by the gentle nudge of your Spirit we pray,

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

610 STF – Best of all is God is with us OR

693 STF – Beauty for brokenness

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by All We Can

## **Prayers of intercession**

Heavenly Father,

We pray for the students and teachers in our communities.

We thank you for all who work to see potential fulfilled in other people.

Leader: Lord of transformation,

**All: Turn the ordinary into the extraordinary**

We pray for those who are living in poverty in our midst. We pray that the work of All We Can and their partners all around the world, seeking to bring change.

Lord of transformation,

**Turn the ordinary into the extraordinary**

Help us all to fulfil our God-given potential. May each of us see our role in making the world a better place, even if that involves letting go of power and privilege to enable others to live life to the maximum and see their hopes and dreams become a reality.

Lord of transformation,

**Turn the ordinary into the extraordinary**

We pray for our heads of government and those in positions of power. We ask for them to be motivated to eradicate injustice and inequality.

Lord of transformation,

**Turn the ordinary into the extraordinary**

We thank you for the NHS and the amazing staff that keep it running. We pray for communities where access to healthcare is difficult and limited.

Lord of transformation,

**Turn the ordinary into the extraordinary**

We thank you for the opportunity to keep learning and growing. We pray for young people around the world who do not have access to education, and give thanks for all working to ensure they can access schooling and fulfil their potential.

Lord of transformation,

**Turn the ordinary into the extraordinary**

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

Accept these, our gifts Lord God.

May change begin with us, and may we take the ordinary, every-day things you have given to us, and turn them into something extraordinary, in your hands.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by All We Can

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



**Hymn:**

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

699 STF – God of justice

**Blessing**

May God help us to turn our lives towards him,  
May he use us to transform the lives of those around us  
And join in with what the Spirit of God is doing already.  
May Almighty God bless you and guide you on your way,

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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