

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 15A

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

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Ordinary 15 - Year A
16th July 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

507 STF – O for a heart to praise my God OR

156 STF – From the breaking of the dawn to the setting of the sun

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

454 STF – Where shall my wondering soul begin

Readings: Genesis 25:19-34; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Hymn:

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free OR

671 STF – What shall we offer our good Lord?

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

477 STF – Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart OR

742 STF – We trust the mighty love of God

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

668 STF – Teach me, my God and King

Blessing

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Call to worship

Gracious God,
We gather this day, to worship you, our living God.
We gather together with the body of Christ, around the world and across history
We gather to pray, to sing, to reflect and to be transformed,
By your Spirit, Lord God.
Amen.¹

Hymn:

507 STF – O for a heart to praise my God OR

156 STF – From the breaking of the dawn to the setting of the sun

Opening Prayers

Let us just be quiet for a moment.

[Pause]

Think of a place that you love to be in, a place that brings you peace – perhaps it reminds you of God or reveals something of God's nature to us. It might be by the sea, in your garden, at home, a favourite holiday spot, a mountain or a skyscraper. Perhaps for many of us it will be connected to a beautiful landscape or a special view.

Let us just pause for a moment, imagining yourself into that place. What can you see? How do you feel?

Firstly, let us pause and give thanks.

Lord of our special places, we give thanks for these special places and all that they mean to us. We give thanks for the memories this place connects us with, and the special people associated with this place, perhaps faces, names and stories we remember when we come here.

Living God, we give you thanks for your creation and all the joy and wonder it brings us. We pause to give you thanks.

[Quiet]

Secondly, still imagining ourselves in this special place, we pause to say sorry, sorry to you Lord God.

As we look out on our special places, we feel a sense of connection to all the other special places people are imagining in this room and all the other precious parts of your creation, no matter how popular or appreciated. We say sorry.

We say sorry for the damage we have done to these places, and the ways we have been part of systems that have damaged your world, or the people who live there. We are sorry for the pollution, destruction and pain that we inflict on each other, and on your world.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

For the sake of these special places, the people of your world, and all that we love we ask that you would move, inspire and transform us. Accept us as we are, and use us for your work to create a better, safer, fairer world.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Do you have a favourite story?

Give people time to share their favourite stories.

Jesus understood the power of stories. Jesus told stories because he knew if he did that we would remember the message he wanted to communicate better.

One day, Jesus was sitting on the shore of a lake. He began teaching the people on the shore. More people came to hear what Jesus was saying. Soon the beach was filled with people. There were so many that Jesus decided to get in a boat and float it out from the beach. Then he could speak loudly and everyone could hear him without being so crowded.

One of the stories he told is known as the 'parable of the sower'. This is a Jesus-story about a farmer who planted some seeds.

Farmers in those times did not plant seeds using tractors. The farmer would take a hand full of seeds and carefully toss them onto the soil. After he was finished, he would cover the seeds over with soil and then wait for the plants to grow. Planting seeds is called "sowing".

The farmer in the story started throwing the seed on the ground. Some fell on the hard path nearby and the birds came and ate them.

The next seeds fell near some rocks the farmer had in a pile nearby. There was not much dirt around the rocks so the seeds started to sprout and grow the next day. When seeds aren't planted in the dirt they don't grow roots which help them stay strong and grow properly. So, in the afternoon when the sun was very hot the little plants that started to grow among the rocks withered away and died because they had no root in the ground.

As the farmer continued to throw seeds onto the ground, some of the seeds fell among the weeds and thorns that he hadn't pulled out. The thorns grew faster and taller than the seeds, so the seeds could not get enough sunlight and were choked out by the thorns.

Finally, some seed fell on the good soil that the farmer had worked and dug holes for the seed to go into. Those seeds made plants and those plants produced lots and lots of vegetables.

² Opening prayers written by The Joint Public Issues Team

You see, the seed is the message of God's love. For God's love to take root in our hearts we need the right attitude and openness. Are we open to God's love? Are we inviting that love to take root today?

Also, the story highlights the importance of the farmer who spreads the seeds. We too need to be like that farmer and spread the good news of God's love to those that we meet. Maybe have a think about who you could share God's love with? It could be a school friend, work colleague or a loved one. Let's be like that farmer and spread God's love far and wide with those that we meet.

Amen.³

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

454 STF – Where shall my wondering soul begin

Readings: Genesis 25:19-34; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Hymn:

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free OR

671 STF – What shall we offer our good Lord?

Reflections on the readings

Have you ever planted a seed, and watched it germinate?

That which appears dead, coming to life in the soil – slowly, carefully, deliberately, seeking out the light and the nutrients.

Jesus so often turns to the natural world for his images, metaphors and parables and – in a largely agrarian society – he naturally tells stories about farming. We get that again today with the famous 'parable of the sower'.

This is a parable about Good News. About the planting of the gospel into the places and spaces around us. The sower recognises the abundance of the seed – sowing without discrimination and minimal concern as to where the seed lands, because he seems to know that enough will find that good soil and flourish. The parable ends with this evocative challenge: 'whoever has ears, let them hear'. And that's what we will try to do today – to share together so that we might 'hear' what the passage has to say.

This is a parable that has lots of interpretations including – quite rarely in the gospels – an explanation a few verses later in the text itself. So often, Jesus' stories are left unexplained, for us to do the unpacking and the work thousands of years later with very little context and an awful lot of translation required!

Turn to the person next to you, or break into a small group, to discuss these two questions. I'm going to read the questions out first, and then read the Bible passage

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

again, and then read the questions once more so you have them in your mind ready to discuss.

1. What is your initial response to the Parable of the Sower today? If it is a story you know well, listen out for whether it challenges you in a new way?
2. How valuable do you find the explanation of the parable in Matthew's gospel? Should we treat this with the same level of reverence as the story itself? Are there any reasons why we shouldn't?

Read Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23 again.

Repeat the questions.

Give people 8-10 minutes in groups / pairs to discuss their responses, and take feedback if helpful.

Thank you. I hope you felt that was a useful conversation. The parables of Jesus often cause conversation and debate in the scriptures, and they have been doing the same for the last two thousand years, all over the world. How we come to interpret and re-interpret them depends on our ability to speak and share together.

The reading from Paul's letter to the Romans throws in another important idea into all that we have just been discussing around the role of the 'good news' and how it is at work in the world. Chapter 8 of Paul's letter wrestles with the interplay between the Spirit and the flesh, between that which is embodied and that which is holy or divine. It is in Christ that these two things come together, as Paul says elsewhere (in Colossians), it is in Christ that all things hold together: the spiritual and the earthly.

Do you see the two as distinct? How might you attempt to describe the difference or the relationship between the flesh and the Spirit?

Spend a minute thinking about this, in quiet. No need to talk to anyone, this is time to just reflect on your own. Do you agree with Paul's distinction between Spirit and flesh?

[Pause for a minute or two. Take responses from the congregation if helpful].

What about us? Let us close by reflecting on how it is that we can respond to these readings.

Spend a few minutes back in your groups or pairs, sharing your thoughts in response to these prompts:

1. What do I think God might be inviting me to do as a response to today's act of worship?
2. How can I spread Good News in the places or communities where I spend my time?
3. Am I able to share something of the way God is at work through me, even though I know I am not perfect and have made lots of mistakes?

[Give people as long as you think is helpful and they remain engaged in the conversation. It might be helpful to facilitate these conversations with some people who are prepared to keep bringing the group discussions back to the question at hand. If some people would prefer not to talk, but want to write or draw their answers, you might like to have a group in the corner where people are writing rather than chatting].

Let us close in prayer.

God who is Spirit, thank you for the richness of the conversation today, for the way you have spoken to and challenged us as we have shared, listened, and learned together.

Thank you that, by some miracle, you are holding all things together though Jesus Christ.

Help us to be Good News in the spaces and places where we are known this week Amen..⁴

Hymn:

477 STF – Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart OR

742 STF – We trust the mighty love of God

Prayers of intercession

God of all grace, we come to you today to pray for the world you made.

Gracious Jesus, we come to you today to pray for the world you loved and in which you lived.

Holy Spirit of grace, we come to you today and ask your help as we offer our prayers for others.

We pray for the world in which evil so often seems to have the upper hand;

We hold in your love those who are caught up in human trafficking... those who are exploited... those who are abused... those who are victims of violence...

We pray too for those who perpetrate such violence, oppression and exploitation and for all who work for justice, peace and dignity for all people...

God of all grace, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the church, seeking a path of goodness and holiness which glorifies you;

We hold in your love all who lead the church in this and every land... those who preach... those who serve... those who speak truth to power... those who risk their own lives for the sake of others...

We pray too for churches which are divided, groups which feel marginalised or ignored, situations where individuals have been isolated.

God of all grace, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for this community, with its glimpses of glory and moments of inhumanity;

We hold in your love all in hospital, or suffering at home and those who care for them... we hold in your love our schools, their pupils, staff and governors... we hold in your love our police force and all who work for peace... we pray for those who are in prison and all involved in support for those who struggle...

God of all grace, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our families, our church family, our friends and our neighbours;

We hold in your love those who are most precious to us, each of us pausing to picture (or speak the names) of those for whom we pray today... send your grace and

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

blessing we pray on all those known to us who are in particular need at this time... those who are sick, those who are broken-hearted, those who are grieving, those who are lost and confused...

God of all grace, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves, in our own journey of laughter and lament, wholeness and brokenness;

We offer ourselves afresh to receive your grace... praying that we may be given the resources we need to face this day, the next day and all the coming days with grace and courage. We offer ourselves to be moulded by your Holy Spirit that we may live to the praise of your glory – now and forever.

God of all grace, **hear our prayer.**

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Holy God, you are the source of all we have received and all we are. In this moment, we return to you the gifts we have received, and our whole lives. Take us as we are, and use us to bring about transformation and change,

In Jesus' name,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

668 STF – Teach me, my God and King

Blessing

Go out from this place, inspired and uplifted to bring about change in the world. Go out into the world, amongst all the disheartening and disappointing moments of life, and know that the God of love goes with you, before you, alongside you and within you.

Go to be a people of love, grace and peace.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker