

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 25A

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

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Ordinary 25 - Year A
24th September 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

79 STF – I'll praise my Maker while I've breath OR

518 STF – Father, hear the prayer we offer

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

492 STF – Christ be my leader by night as by day OR

116 STF – Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation

Readings: Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

351 STF – In Christ alone my hope is found OR

686 STF – Jesus, Lord, we look to thee

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

459 STF – Captain of Israel's host, and Guide OR

287 STF – When I survey the wondrous cross

Blessing

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Call to worship

Generous God,
We come to you knowing that we need your grace again,
Your generosity again,
Your love again.
We come to you, just as we are, knowing that we are accepted.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

79 STF – I'll praise my Maker while I've breath OR
518 STF – Father, hear the prayer we offer

Opening Prayers

God of abundant grace,
Open our hearts to you this day and always.

Help us to notice all the ways you pour out your love into our lives.

We come to you in prayer and worship,
To pour back as praise all that we have received from you.

It is plentiful, thank you, that it is plentiful.

[Pause].

God of abundant grace, we are hungry for your love and forgiveness,
You provide us with all we need each day,
you made a way in the wilderness and give us food for the journey,
and yet we wander from your ways, accidentally or on purpose.

We grumble in the face of your generosity.
We turn away ashamed from your love.
We go back to ways of greed and selfishness.
Help us and forgive us, merciful God.

Pour out your grace into our hearts,
It is enough, thank you, that it is enough for us.

[Pause].

God of abundant grace,
Bring us back to you,
Forgive us all the ways we have strayed.

Assure us of your faithfulness, your provision.

Do your work of healing, and liberation, and transformation in us today,
By your grace,
It is sufficient, thank you, that it is sufficient.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

[Pause].

God of abundant grace,
Thank you that you are here, right here,
Working in this place, in our hearts.

Thank you that your way is not the way of the world
Teach us to walk your way, every day, labouring
In the name of Jesus Christ,
Who saves us, thank you, that he saves us.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

[Prep – Uno Card Slides – you can download pictures from the internet, or perhaps someone in the congregation has a pack of the popular game!]

In 1971, a barber created a game we all play today! And that game is UNO!

The game is very simple: be the first to play all the cards that are in your hand, but remember to call UNO when you have one card remaining. Now there are some cards that make this a little difficult for everyone, but that's just part of the game!

Skip Card: The next player missed their turn. Always a fun card to use when the aim is to get rid of cards and you have no turns to use!

Draw Two: The next player draws 2 cards AND misses their turn! Now this might be a little controversial as some people think you can stack these cards up until someone has to draw 10, or they draw 2 and still play a card!

Fun Fact! The Progressive or Stacking Uno rule, where a draw two can become a draw four, draw six, etc. is a house rule, but so common was its use that in 2019 the creators of the game made a tweet that this wasn't a part of standard UNO rules!

Wild: You change the next colour! A great card for making friends at the table as you decide the colour and it could help the next person!

Wild Draw Four: You decide the next colour and have the next person draw four cards! This seems like a mean card, but in fact in the official rules it has clear punishments for using this card wrong!

And finally: The Reverse Card! You switch the order around! It's always a fun card to play just before a person is about to win, as they can't play any cards and must wait that little bit longer while every other player gets to play more cards.

But! Did you know that God has their own special UNO card? And that UNO card is mentioned in the bible? (Pause for Shock/Confusion)

To demonstrate this rule, lets look at Matthew 20:1-16.

² Opening prayers written by Holly Adams

(Read Matthew 20:1-16, of which the Message Version is below, but please use a version that you are comfortable with)

“God’s kingdom is like an estate manager who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. They agreed on a wage of a pound a day, and went to work.

Later, about nine o’clock, the manager saw some other men hanging around the town square unemployed. He told them to go to work in his vineyard and he would pay them a fair wage. They went.

He did the same thing at noon, and again at three o’clock. At five o’clock he went back and found still others standing around. He said, ‘Why are you standing around all day doing nothing?’

They said, ‘Because no one hired us.’

He told them to go to work in his vineyard.

When the day’s work was over, the owner of the vineyard instructed his foreman, ‘Call the workers in and pay them their wages. Start with the last hired and go on to the first.’

Those hired at five o’clock came up and were each given a pound. When those who were hired first saw that, they assumed they would get far more. But they got the same, each of them one dollar. Taking the pound, they groused angrily to the manager, ‘These last workers put in only one easy hour, and you just made them equal to us, who slaved all day under a scorching sun.’

He replied to the one speaking for the rest, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair. We agreed on the wage of a pound, didn’t we? So take it and go. I decided to give to the one who came last the same as you. Can’t I do what I want with my own money? Are you going to get stingy because I am generous?’

Here it is again, the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first.”

God’s Reverse Card switch the order around so that people miss out, like in UNO. Rather, God’s Great Reversal Card is also known as God’s Grace; something that we can all get as Christians. It doesn’t matter if we choose to follow Jesus at the start of the day, the end of the day, the start of our lives or the end of our lives; we all gain the same Grace.

Let us pray.

Loving God, be with us all on our journey of faith. May we live in a way that enables your Grace to fill not only our lives, but that of others as well.

Amen.³

Hymn:

492 STF – Christ be my leader by night as by day OR

116 STF – Sing for God’s glory that colours the dawn of creation

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Readings: Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

Reflections on the readings

"What theme might we notice in our four scripture readings for today? In our Old Testament reading, God provides abundant manna to the hungry Israelites in the wilderness. Then in the Psalm, the Israelites sing praises to God, remembering all the ways God has abundantly provided for them. In the epistle, Paul writes to the Philippians, saying that despite his sufferings, he looks forward to joining with them in abundant boasting in their faith in Jesus Christ. And finally in the Gospel, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, the workers who deserve less, having arrived last and worked the least, are – seemingly unfairly – paid abundantly for their work.

There's that one word running like a golden thread through these four passages: abundance. It is abundance that defines God's economy – an economy of grace.

I once heard it said that karma is the opposite of grace, for this reason: if you believe in karma, you believe you get what you deserve: everything you do wrong counts against you, and everything you do right counts in your favour. However, with grace, it is the exact opposite: you get what you don't deserve; no matter how undeserving you are or feel, God's grace is abundantly yours, and it is always enough.

This is the abundance of God's economy of grace. It is an economy that has never been afraid of scarcity. As American theologian and pastor, Nadia Bolz Weber writes:

I'm certain that scarcity is not something that God fears – after all, how many stories are there in the Bible of water appearing from nowhere, and flour and oil lasting forever, and manna from heaven and the feeding of thousands with a couple loaves and few fish. Scarcity is not the origin of value for God, I think the boundlessness of God's own heart is the origin of value to God. I mean, come on, God did not create the heavens and the earth by holding back in case he ran out.

In God's economy, the storehouses of grace are stacked to the ceilings, and the gates are open wide. There is no fear for any of us that there might not be enough grace for us, or that it might not be available to us.

Are you somebody who finds it hard to believe in your own entitlement? Are you convinced that God's abundant love and grace are actually scarce when it comes to you? Perhaps you're like the workers in the parable who were hired later in the day, and are convinced you'll receive a pitiful wage as a result. It can be hard to believe, for whatever reason – shame, or self-loathing, or sadness – that God's abundance is for us, too.

Or perhaps, if we look again at the parable, we see another reason why not everyone is over the moon about this abundant provision. The workers who had worked the longest expected to be paid more than those who had just worked an hour or two. They were annoyed and grumbled about the fact that the idle workers had been paid the same.

I wonder how many of us relate to those angry hard-working labourers? Working themselves into the ground all day, just to receive the same appreciation as people who've barely lifted a finger? I know I've found myself feeling bitter sometimes, at the end of a long day, perhaps a church coffee morning, or a work event, or a family party – when I feel I've worked harder than most and not received due recognition.

It seems that the good news of God's economy – that grace is available in abundance to all – doesn't always feel like good news, when you're the one who feels most deserving. But this parable is a lesson to us about privilege. Jesus is saying to those of us who suffer with a sense of entitlement: do you really think your privilege matters? Do you think you matter more than others? Do you, in some secret corner of your heart, think people with less than you are deserving of their lot? Examine your own deep sense of entitlement and then rethink what the Kingdom of Heaven might look like. Abundance for all is good news, but it might not feel like it if it means you are the one moving from first to last in the queue. And yet, if you can leave off your grumbling for just a moment, you'll notice that your cup overflows as much as anyone's.

But what if you're somebody who's moving from last to first? How might it feel to suddenly realise God's abundant provision is for you, too, and in the Kingdom of God you are moving up the queue? This must have been something like the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness in the Exodus story, experiencing a drastic shift in their own power and liberation and value.

God's provision of manna for them to eat is a visible sign of God's assurance to the Israelites that God is with them and for them and will not let them starve or struggle. But more than this, it's a continuation of their liberation and healing from slavery. In Egypt they would have relied upon their slave masters' storehouses and generosity for food. Their whole lives were subject to the greed of the powerful, to the hungry desires of the rich.

Manna is not just a miracle of food provision, it's an abundant pouring out of love on a broken people who had been subject to an economy of scarcity for their whole lives. Their very value as people had been as meagre as the meals they ate in Egypt. Now, in the wilderness, their value as beloved children of God became as abundant as the manna they received.

The daily ritual of collecting the manna and distributing it amongst the community, and observing the Sabbath, was a practice of a people living in God's economy of abundance where food and rest was available for all.

We know, almost as well as the Israelites, that living in God's economy of abundant provision doesn't mean that suffering will never befall us. Paul's epistle to the Philippians is a reminder of this, too. For Paul, the abundant grace he receives through his faith in Jesus far offsets the sufferings he endures as a result of that faith.

Paul writes that God has "graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well." It is hard to imagine suffering as a privilege, but we must remember that for Paul, whose conversion to Christianity has resulted in extreme persecution, suffering and belief are so much part of the same experience that perhaps it's hard for him to separate them. His belief in Jesus Christ has made him radically different to others around him, so much so that he's a threat to the authorities.

Both the Exodus passage and the epistle teach us that God's economy challenges the economies of power and greed and scarcity of the Egyptian slave-masters of the Egyptians and the Roman authorities. Still now, today, God's economy of abundant grace is challenging the status quo in us and around us. Abundance is a radically

different system to greed, to fear of scarcity, to hunger for power. God's economy of abundant grace reshuffles the status quo.

And the Gospel reading today teaches us to challenge the state of our own hearts – do we believe God's abundance is for us? If not, we should be prepared to be surprised by the abundance we are offered. Or do we have a secret sense of entitlement or bitterness in us that we need to address? Might we be surprised to find ourselves last, when we thought we'd be first?

This is God's economy of abundant grace – which, if we let it, will transform us, and the world around us.

Questions for discussion, in small groups or – if it is a relatively small congregation you could have the discussion as a whole church.

- Who do you relate to most, the workers who are surprised that they receive so much, or the workers who grumble because they feel hard done by?
- What are you learning about yourself and God's abundant love of you at the moment?
- In your community, where do you see signs of God's Kingdom? What systems and injustices of greed and power need challenging?
- How might you live out God's abundant love and generosity with others as a way of sharing the good news you experience?⁴

Hymn:

351 STF – In Christ alone my hope is found OR
686 STF – Jesus, Lord, we look to thee

Prayers of intercession

Our prayers are based on the words from the Psalm today. Let us pray.

Voice 1: O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name...

Remember the wonderful works he has done...

Sing to him, sing praises to him;

tell of all his wonderful works.

Voice 2: We pray for the church around the world. May we be a people who notice your wonderful works all around us, who sing your praises every day of the week. Give us courage to tell of all your works in our communities and families. In a moment of silence now, we think of somebody in particular who we could share your love with this week.

God of abundance, strengthen your church.

Voice 1: Glory in his holy name;

let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Seek the Lord and his strength;

seek his presence continually.

Voice 2: We pray for all those whose hearts seek the Lord today, for all those in need of God's comfort and strength. We think especially of people struggling with illness,

⁴ Reflection written by Holly Adams

grief or loneliness. In a moment of silence, we think of anyone in particular we know of who needs to know your peace and presence today, God.

God of abundance, be with them.

Voice 1: So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing.

Voice 2: We pray for all those around the world who cannot today experience joy and laughter and singing. We lift up countries stricken with war, famine, or corruption. We ask that that grace might prevail over greed. In a moment of silence, we think of any specific situation in the world that's on our minds this morning, who need to experience your justice today, God.

God of abundance, bring peace to your world.

Voice 1: He brought Israel out with silver and gold,
and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.
He spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.

Voice 2: We pray for all those in leadership who need you to guide them God, so that they may not stumble from your path of goodness. You guided your people in the wilderness by day and by night, we think now of our government, our local leaders, our church leaders.

God of abundance, bring wisdom to all who lead.

Voice 1: They asked, and he brought quails,
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.
He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river.

Voice 2: We pray for ourselves. God you always know what we need. You know what we need right now. Just as you provided food from heaven and water from the rock in the wilderness for the Israelites, we ask that you might meet the needs of us today. We offer them to you in silence now.

God of abundance, feed us.

Both voices: Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Holy God,
We have received so much from you,
So much that we take for granted.
Accept these gifts, these humble, simple gifts,
As a token of our love for you,
And our desire for justice and peace in your world,
Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Holly Adams

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Hymn:

459 STF – Captain of Israel's host, and Guide OR

287 STF – When I survey the wondrous cross

Blessing

I want to live in a world more like your kingdom,
And less like the kingdom of greed we find ourselves in.

No longer the kingdom of comfort,
But forever, the Kingdom of heaven.

Be at work in me, Lord God, by your Spirit,

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker