

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 18B

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

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **theworshipcloud.com**

Ordinary 18 - Year B
1st August 2021



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

125 STF – Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer OR

329 STF – Jesus, the First and Last

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

577 STF – Bread of life, hope of the world OR

322 STF – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

Readings: 2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a; John 6:24-35

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

421 STF – Empty broken, here I stand OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

What am I being called to?

Hymn:

365 STF – Jesu, the joy of loving hearts OR

593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky OR

252 STF – Jesus, the Lord said: 'I am the bread'

Blessing

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.

Copyright for content is retained by the original author / contributor.

www.theworshipcloud.com

Call to worship

We are the people of The Word,
And we gather this day, to hear words, to pray in words,
And to connect with The Word who is all around us.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

125 STF – Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer OR
329 STF – Jesus, the First and Last

Opening Prayers

God of all wisdom, we give you thanks for the times in which we have experienced your wisdom in our lives.

Let us be still and gather ourselves in the space.

Let us seek to open ourselves out to connect with the Spirit of God who comes amongst us, by some mystery.

[Pause]

Forgive us for those times where we've failed to recognise your presence and give us the courage to walk away from situations that prevent us and others from receiving all that you have to offer us.

Open our eyes to new and exciting ways of being so that all who we encounter, will experience your wisdom and love.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Have you ever been seated, enjoying a delicious meal, to then find someone's fork reach across your plate and steal a little food? Maybe they were a good friend and thought it's okay. Maybe it was a relative who had paid for the meal so they thought they could. Maybe you hardly knew them and you thought what a cheeky person they are.

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Ramona Samuel

Jesus didn't have his own plate where he found others helping themselves to food. He gave to others, abundantly. He fed people whenever they needed – think of all those stories where he fed thousands of people. He knew they needed to eat and so he provided. When he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, he even made sure she was fed straight away.

But some people thought that's what he was all about: a wandering meal-provider, modern equivalent of Just Eat or Deliveroo. They even backed up their view by saying he was just like Moses – providing manna in the wilderness, a sort of snack found on the ground.

Jesus tells them though. He reminds them he's not just about the food we need to satisfy our physical needs - the food we put into our stomachs. He reminds them that it wasn't Moses who provided in the past, it was God in heaven. And now Jesus provides the bread of life.

This is the food of heaven, the food which satisfies the soul, the food which gives us life in its fullest, the life of God where we become all we're meant to be in this life and beyond.

It's not that Jesus doesn't think we should fill our plates and enjoy the food for our stomachs. He made sure other people's stomachs were full. It's that Jesus also wants us to have life beyond our physical needs. So next time you eat, remember the bread of life from Jesus. For Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."³

Hymn:

577 STF – Bread of life, hope of the world OR

322 STF – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

Readings: 2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a; John 6:24-35

Reflections on the reading

Recently, our household experienced what I'd like to call 'The Case of the Mysteriously Mouldy Bread'. A fresh loaf of bread, stored in the bread bin in the kitchen, suddenly, and apparently inexplicably, went mouldy overnight. Initially, as you might imagine, there was a good deal of frustration at the loss of the bread and the need to acquire another loaf before lunchtime. Frustration gave way a little to a desire to find fault: we examined the loaf's packaging, checked the 'best before' date, and scoffed a little about 'dodgy batches'.

³ All Age Talk written by Gary Hopkins

It was only a few days later, as I saw my husband carry a (different!) new loaf of bread out of the kitchen and place it onto the dining room table that I realised that he had worked out what had happened. As he carried the loaf of bread from the kitchen, I was popping on the heater under the kitchen cabinets to give a load of drying laundry a little kick start at the end of a rainy day... just as I had done a few days earlier.

I had created the perfect environment for the bread to mould, releasing a lovely damp, warm air into the kitchen in the hope of my laundry drying a little quicker. As eager as I had been to find the fault somewhere, I hadn't stopped to consider that it may have been as a consequence of my own action that the bread had gone mouldy.

Today's lectionary readings speak of bread, and of needing to recognise the consequences of actions, so I hope our unfortunate incident with 'The Case of the Mysteriously Mouldy Bread' may help us to reflect on these accounts, one from the life of King David and the other from the life of Jesus.

Let's turn then to our first passage, from 2 Samuel chapter 11 verse 26 to chapter 12 verse 13a. It's not an easy part of David's story that we pick up here. King David, the golden boy, has taken another man's wife, Bathsheba, to bed and she is pregnant. Her husband, Uriah, is one of the military men under David's command, and David has chosen to send Uriah to a particularly dangerous battlefield in the hope that Uriah will die in battle before he discovers the betrayal and pregnancy. Uriah does indeed die in the fighting, and perhaps David breathes a sigh of relief: he won't be caught out.

As you might expect, this behaviour offends and angers God. God sends the prophet, Nathan, to speak with David, and Nathan approaches the King and tells him the story of the rich man and the poor man.

As Nathan speaks, David's anger burns against the fictional rich man who abuses his power and takes the precious ewe lamb from the poor man. He is quick to express how awful he considers this behaviour to be, and how harsh the punishment ought to be for the rich man. He fails, though, to see that he himself is the rich man in his own story. David took from Uriah what was so precious to this man who had not much, abusing the great deal of power and wealth that he himself had, and yet struggles at first to identify his own behaviour in the allegory Nathan tells. When Nathan reveals the truth to him, David is confronted with the reality of his own judgement, and indeed that of God's too.

There are clear lessons for us to learn from this story about honesty, integrity, fidelity and the right use of power and authority. But perhaps there is also a great lesson for us to learn here about how we situate ourselves in the stories of our faith. David was told a story from which it was intended he would learn. Scripture is the word of God given to us, that we might learn more about God and more about ourselves.

When you read this story from 2 Samuel, do you instinctively try to situate yourself in the story, as one of the main characters? Does the character of Nathan resonate well with you, or that of Bathsheba or Uriah or one of the fictional characters from the story Nathan tells? Or do you feel yourself confronted by King David in his darkest hours? How ready am I, are we, to acknowledge that sometimes our behaviour most closely matches the wrong doer in the parts of Scripture which are tough to tackle? I imagine I'm not writing to many kings who have had soldiers killed to cover infidelity, but I expect a good number of us have been guilty of a good many acts we would criticise in others, and share the story of a privileged person using their power and authority in ways which contradict the law of love. When we do that, we take from the more vulnerable the things precious to them which are incidental, disposable, taken for granted by those of us who have more. We need to ask ourselves as individuals if we are guilty of this, and we need, too, to ask when we have been guilty of this as Church. Because even if we can't personally identify with the most vulnerable in the story, others would, and sometimes we have been the ones to cause pain.

Like David confronted by Nathan's words, are we ready to be confronted with the devastating reality that we have done things that have hurt others and displeased God?

The good news is that David repents, is forgiven, and he is still the famed King David of whose line Jesus is born. When we recognise and repent of our sins, however grave, we find in God a forgiveness we can hardly begin to comprehend.

How can we respond to forgiveness and faithfulness from God when we so often make mistakes?

Jesus' disciples ask the pertinent question in John 6, verse 28: 'What must we do, to do the work God requires?', and surely this is the most important question. 'What can we do, for God who has done so much for us?'

And Jesus responds 'This is the work of God: to believe in the one he has sent.' There is no work we can do perfectly, but we can believe. We will make mistakes, get things wrong, sometimes in the full knowledge that what we're doing is not right. Sometimes we will work hard to do what we believe God wants, and sometimes we'll knowingly turn away. Often we'll get it a bit wrong however well-intentioned we are.

But if we believe in the one whom God sent, we believe in a faithfulness beyond any we could begin to demonstrate. We believe in a bread that will sustain our living and loving, that will never stop feeding us.

God who provided manna in the desert gives to us, in Jesus, a bread that doesn't disappear overnight, or that goes mouldy and becomes useless when we create the conditions to make it spoil. Christ is the bread of life who will continue to feed us when we get things right, and when we get it wrong. There is nothing that can separate us from Christ's love and faithfulness to us.

When we read the stories of God through the Bible, are we ready to make ourselves vulnerable, ready to see mirrored back to us our own vulnerabilities or wrong behaviours? And when we do that, are we ready to turn, repentant, and find the outrageous, wonderful presence of Christ sustaining us for ever? When we break bread, are we ready to receive and accept that we are indeed the broken body of Christ, pointing always to the bread that will never spoil or run out?

Who are we, when we read the stories? Whichever character we are, we are always the people who believe in the one whom God sends. And that's enough.

Hymn:

421 STF – Empty broken, here I stand OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

What are you being called to?

[You might like to use the video version of this spoken word piece by Becki Stennett – The Vine Video for today. If you have the opportunity and it works in your setting, you could allow a moment for people to respond to the piece, asking them what they took from the piece and the extent to which they 'see themselves' in the stories of the Bible].

When we pick up this book,
Let it open in hands,
Do we expect only to find ancient people in far off lands?
Is it ancient wisdom, okay for a time
Long past,
Quaint in prose and rhyme,
Or does this book – this word –
Live in ways we can't always know?
Does it give to us new life, these words written long ago?

If these words are only ancient,
Consigned to a past long dead,
We ought perhaps leave them there,
Or we could delve into it instead, and see that
All humanity is written on these pages,
The story of God at work throughout the ages
And recognise there are no new stories really,
But tales repeated often of God's glory,
And our attempt to worship, follow,
Sometimes successfully, and sometimes less so.

When we read the story of King David,
The rich man, the poor man and the prophet named Nathan,
Do we leave it there in history and declare ourselves

By some mystery – far beyond, above,
Such abuse of power and ignorance of the law of love?

Or are we prepared to see ourselves in the writing,
As abusers of power, willing to let others suffer in the fighting,
To sweep our ill behaviours under the rug.
Or to see ourselves – or others – as the abused who becomes a mother,
In the line of Jesus:
Yes! But so vulnerable nonetheless.
As we look into the story and consider it a mirror,
Do we wonder how David treated her, how we treat others like her?

David couldn't see himself within the story,
Only sat a while, basking in his kingly glory,
Until his eyes were opened and he saw the truth in the allegory,
Saw his behaviour was so terrible, awful
Unlawful in the eyes of God, who surely gave David all his might
And authority, and who amazingly
Forgave him so that David might be the king from whose line the Saviour would
come.

If we leave the holy tales to simply fade and pale,
Into a history we've moved on from,
Then we have forgotten that this work of ages,
Is our story too, splashed across the pages.
It's the story of a people trying to get things right
And being reminded, sometimes, that they might
Just have strayed, forgotten God, hurt others, not lived as sisters and brothers
As they should.
And for us, who live by the Word of God, there is no new story
There is us, and God, and world which needs to see God's glory,
And just might see God's glory if
When we pick up this book, let it open in our hands,
We begin to understand that we are in these stories
We are on these pages
Written in long-past ages.
Their story. Our story.
Our past and future glory,
In a Word which lives,
And longs for conversation with us,
Speaking to us today,
If only we can let it.

Hymn:

365 STF – Jesu, the joy of loving hearts OR
593 STF – Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray.

God of all grace, we bring you ourselves.

We bring you our lives, as they currently are, with all that is broken and wrong, but also much to be grateful for and to celebrate.

Use us, O God, to build your kingdom, to seek peace in our world, to build communities of love.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we bring you our churches,

Caught in this strange 'in between' time, as we reflect on the painful experiences of lockdown, and how we can best serve our communities and our world over this summer and into the year ahead.

Show us how to create safe spaces, spaces where people can grieve, can find healing, can meet with you and be transformed by your grace.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we bring you our nation,

We bring to you all who have been working overtime to see us through this time of crisis, and all who will need to work overtime as we seek to rebuild our communities, our economy, our relationships and our livelihoods.

We bring you our leaders and all who must face difficult decisions or face up to inadequacies in our systems exposed by the process of lockdown and pandemic.

Show us how to be a people of grace.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we pray for our world.

As we look out on a global pandemic, and a world in which we have gone backwards in tackling poverty and reaching those most in need during this time of pandemic, which has affected the most vulnerable in our world more than many of us.

As we rebuild, show us how to build a world in which every person's needs are provided for. A world where every person's potential is fulfilled.

May we follow in your way, O God.

May I follow in your way, O God.

Show me what is mine to do.

We bring this, and all our prayers, in Jesus' name,

Amen.⁴

We will now take up the offering.

⁴ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

Blessing the offering

Living God, we have received so much,
We hold so many blessings in our hands, in our lives, in our homes, in our communities.

Today, we recognise all that as grace, all as gift,
And we return all that we have and all that we are, to your kingdom
A kingdom of justice and joy,

Amen.⁵

Hymn:

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky OR

252 STF – Jesus, the Lord said: 'I am the bread'

Blessing

Arise from this place and go out into the world.
A world of so much division and pain,
A world crying out for love,
You, each one of you, can be that bit of love for someone this week.

Amen.⁶

⁵ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker