

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 27B

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

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Ordinary 27 - Year B
3rd October 2021



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

138 STF – O God, beyond all thought OR

499 STF – Great God, your love has called us here

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

41 STF – Blessed be your name in the land that is plentiful OR

317 STF – At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow

Readings: Job 1:1, 2:1-10; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12; Mark 10:2-16

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

342 STF – All hail the power of Jesu's name OR

526 STF – Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy

What am I being called to?

Hymn:

354 STF – Jesus is the name we honour OR

607 STF – When love is found and hope comes home

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

564 STF – O thou who camest from above OR

103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him

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:

138 STF – O God, beyond all thought OR
499 STF – Great God, your love has called us here

Opening Prayers

O God, we welcome you here this day,
Let us worship and praise your name together.

We come with the burdens and worries of this past week,
May we as a community shoulder them together.

And as we gather, we are one family,
We are siblings united by the love of Jesus and called to emulate this love in our
daily lives.

Come let us be joyful in the Lord,
Hallelujah,

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

What does your experience of God feel like? How would you describe God? Do you have some words, phrases, ideas or images that help you explain what the divine means to you?

Wherever you are on your journey with God, whether you have been a firm believer all your life, or are just beginning (or beginning again) to ask questions about the nature of God and spirituality, it can be difficult to find the words to describe God. Just spend a moment now, turn to the person sitting next to you – or the people either side of you – and see if you can come up with a few words or an image to describe something about God.

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Annan-Hood

What words come into your head when I ask you to imagine God?

[Pause for people to talk].

Let's hear some of your ideas...

[Spend some time talking about some of the words and phrases that are generated: do other people find them helpful, have you got lots of similar words or some that are very different? If there are children and young people in the congregation, pay particular attention to some of their ideas.]

In churches, and in the history of the Christian religion, people have often tried to make describing God and explaining spirituality a very complicated and academic process. They have used long words, technical terms and difficult ideas to try to get to grips with who God is. Of course, the development of 'theology' (as we call the study of God) is a crucial part of how Christianity has grown and continues to find ways to respond to a changing world. However, we must make sure that we don't make God more complicated than God already is...

Jesus talks (as we shall hear later in our service) about letting the 'little children come to him' and reassures us that unless we 'receive the kingdom of God like a little child', we will not really understand who God is. Perhaps sometimes church is too complicated for its own good?

The Christian writer Marcus Borg told a story about some friends who had a small child and a tiny baby. Their child asked to have a moment alone with the baby and the parents heard the child saying to the newborn: 'Tell me about God, I've almost forgotten what he's like...'

Perhaps we all need to be reminded what God looks like by people we might not expect. Can we look out for God in unexpected places this week, as we continue to learn more about how we can be followers of Jesus in this new church year?³

Hymn:

41 STF – Blessed be your name in the land that is plentiful OR

317 STF – At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow

Readings: Job 1:1, 2:1-10; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12; Mark 10:2-16

Reflections on the reading

Perhaps there is a reason Mark puts these two stories (that we just heard from Mark 10) next to each other. In the first, the Pharisees try to test Jesus with a tricky

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

question about marriage (and if you've followed, or been part of, the ongoing conversations within the Methodist Church – or indeed several other major Christian denominations – then you know how divisive the subject can prove!)

Then, immediately afterwards (so much of Mark's gospel is like this, isn't it – one thing followed suddenly by another?), we get the famous story of Jesus saying 'let the little children come to me' and they gather around him, sit at his feet, and he blesses them.

Do these two stories, and the way they interact with other, have something to say about how we interact with the divine? So often, our 'faith' or 'spirituality' is focused on asking tricky questions and – like the Pharisees in Mark 10 – seeking clear, divisive, black-and-white answers on moral and social questions. Perhaps the song by American rock band, Live, should play in our heads during these times:

It's not a black and white world,
To be alive, I say the colours must swirl
And I believe, that maybe today
We will all get to appreciate
The beauty of grey!

So we can be like the Pharisees, or we can be like the children, and simply gather around the feet of the master. Absorbing the love Jesus has for us and for the whole world. Simply come close, and be blessed. And, don't get me wrong, we still need to ask questions – anyone who has ever met a young child knows something of their incessant questioning: the constant 'why? Why? Why? Why? Are we nearly there yet?' But this questioning is from a place of innocent and genuine inquisitiveness, not from a desire to trick anyone, divide people, or score points. I don't remember a time in the Jesus stories where he says, 'let the Pharisees come to me' and they simply gather around him to sit and listen. What an opportunity missed by their judgemental questioning style!

Earlier this year, the Methodist Conference approved a number of resolutions in a report entitled God in Love Unites Us, the latest in a series of reports and conversations about the nature and understanding of marriage within the institution. Today's gospel reading is a key text in this conversation, and the Pharisee's questions continue to be divisive, tricky and painful. The Church has committed itself to an ongoing process of change and an increased desire for inclusivity, where all can be made to feel welcome, including views and doctrine that are more inclusive of people in same-sex marriages and those cohabiting outside of marriage.

The report received a ringing endorsement from the Conference. Yes, there are still a strong minority of people who find the changes in defining marriage difficult, and the whole church has a responsibility to find ways to make sure all are welcome, however you interact with a report like this. At the heart of this report, however, and all the conversations around it is the principal of 'living with contradictory convictions'.

Are we up for the challenge? In Hebrews, we read about one of the great themes of the New Testament – and particularly the Epistles – that all things were created through Christ and that Christ is somehow, mysteriously, drawing all this together. Some of you may have joined All We Can’s online community over the last 18 months or so, called ‘1:17’ because it is inspired by Colossians 1:17 – ‘in Christ all things hold together’. This community has found ways – despite all the division, isolation and separation of life in the pandemic – to embody this togetherness. You can tune in on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, every Wednesday and Friday at just after quarter past 1 – just search for allwecanuk.

Unity matters. God in love **unites** us is an important title. Paul is obsessed with unity in Christ, and the Methodist Church is (led by it’s President, Sonia Hicks) embracing new language around being ‘siblings’ in Christ Jesus. This sibling-unity is not a false attempt to imagine we are somehow all the same, or that we have the same opinions, the same theology, the same cultural backgrounds or the same political inclinations. We are invited into unity, not uniformity.

So, let this be the time in the history of the church – which has too often spent time focusing on the divisive, tricky questions of the Pharisees – let this be the time that we learn how to celebrate diversity. We need breadth, as a movement of people seeking to know Christ and make him known. We need difference and variety – in fact, we need a great deal more of these things in many of our leadership roles (I say, even as a white, straight, cis, neuro-normative man). Our unity needs to be practiced, not just preached. And that means changing the systems and structures – as well as the attitudes and ignorances – in our churches, communities and society that exclude people, on the grounds of race, sexuality, disability, theology, or indeed on any grounds at all.

All are welcome, we sing. But what does that mean? How do we practice that simple togetherness that comes when the children gather around Jesus? ‘Let the little children come to me...for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs’. Let us make sure we don’t play the role of the disciples in this gospel story, turning people away from Jesus and allowing our own judgements, our own interpretations of scripture, our own prejudices get in the way of allowing God’s people to gather around the figure of Jesus.

It seems to me that the New Testament has one great big invitation, to either join in with what we’ll call the ‘Togetherness Project’, or not. To be like the little children, gathering around the Christ – in whom all things are holding together – or to be like the Pharisees, always seeking difficult questions and new ways of dividing people. My daughter is fast-approaching 4-years old, and one of the great themes of her conversation is who her ‘best friends’ are. In fact, she seems to have dozens and dozens of best friends – ranging from soft toys, to kids her own age, right through to her grandparents and a great-grandparent! ‘So-and-so is my best friend’ is one of her favourite sentences, and it always starts with a new person!

That feels like the Togetherness Project to me. Not division or competition, but all are welcome. With the innocence of the child, we enter into the togetherness, into the

Christ-energy that is holding all things together. If we can do that, then it is to people like us that the Kingdom of God belongs.⁴

Hymn:

342 STF – All hail the power of Jesu's name OR
526 STF – Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy

What are you being called to?

Today, we reflect on the invitation in the New Testament to become part of this great big 'Togetherness Project' – to 'hold together in Christ'.

Two questions for you to consider (either in groups or in your own time):

- How can you get involved in the Togetherness Project?
- In what ways are you a barrier to togetherness (i.e. what of your prejudices, actions or opinions are including others)?

In order to live out the hope that is woven throughout the New Testament, that we can unite in God's love, we all have a part to play. We all have barriers to break down, prejudices to identify in ourselves and work on, institutions we need to hold to account for maintaining exclusivity and injustice.

Today, we are inviting you to commit to doing one thing. There are lots of things that need doing, but doing nothing is the most dangerous and unhelpful 'solution'. So today, you are invited simply to think of one thing you could do and/or change to help further the Togetherness Project.

You might like to write down your planned action, and stick it somewhere where you will see it everyday.

Let us pray.

God of love, you invite us into your hope for a better, safe, more unified world.
As we celebrate our diversity and our difference, may we find unity in your love for us, and our love for you.
And may we use that unity to make a world, and a church, where all are welcome.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Hymn:

354 STF – Jesus is the name we honour OR
607 STF – When love is found and hope comes home

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

Prayers of intercession

Let us open our hearts and be vulnerable before Jesus as we share what is on our hearts.

[If it is your practice, there is time indicated below to share prayer needs communally.]

“I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”

Though we are strengthened through Jesus, there are times this past week where we could not sing your praises.

In this world it is hard to be joyful when there are those around us hurting. Those mourning loved ones. Those fighting a daily struggle against an unjust system. Those struggling to put food on the table. Those going through divorce. Those whose families are separated. Those who see images of war, famine and terror and cry “Where are you God!”

In this moment, let us share what is heavy on our hearts.

(Time of silence or a time to share prayer concerns)

When one of us is in pain, we are all in pain, and Jesus weeps with those who weep. As siblings we bring these prayers before you, Jesus, that you may be with them in times of hardship and sorrow.

Let us bring these all before God,

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

Lord, accept these gifts and put them to the use of building your Kingdom.
In Jesus’ name we pray.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

564 STF – O thou who camest from above OR

103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Annan-Hood

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

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