

twelvebaskets



EASTER 3C

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

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Easter 3 - Year C
1st May 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

553 STF – I am a new creation OR

20 STF – Be still, for the presence of the Lord

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

657 STF – You give rest to the weary OR

250 STF – Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult

Readings: Acts 9:1-6; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Hymn:

293 STF – All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord OR

462 STF – Come with me, come wander

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

673 STF – Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? OR

367 STF – When I was lost you came and rescued me Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

358 STF – Let heaven and earth agree OR

313 STF – Thine be the glory

Blessing

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Call to worship

Here we come, to worship.

Here we come, to sing.

Here we come to hope and pray and learn and reflect.

Here we come. Come Lord Jesus,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

553 STF – I am a new creation OR

20 STF – Be still, for the presence of the Lord

Opening Prayers

Lord of all creation,

We come into your presence today, bringing our whole selves as an offering to you.

We come in our strength and weakness;

We come with hopeful expectations that we will meet with you today.

As we join together to worship you,

May the troubles of the past be left in your hands.

May the worries we carry be eased by your grace.

And may the unspoken desires of our hearts be acceptable to you.

Lord, we are here to meet with you.

As Saul fell to the ground on the Damascus Road,

We pray that we will be overwhelmed by your love and Spirit

And join with the chorus of angels proclaiming:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,

to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength

and honour and glory and praise!”

We offer all we are to you.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord’s Prayer

All Age Talk

What do you think of when I say the word ‘grace’? What does grace mean to you?

[Take some suggestions and encourage people to just say the first things that come into their heads. It might be helpful to give people a minute or two to share with someone sitting near them first, and then feedback to the whole congregation].

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

'Grace' has a few meanings in normal, everyday life – and it is a nice name (usually for a girl) which appears to be having a resurgence in popularity. But it is also quite a 'churchy' word, it is something we read about in the Bible, we sing about in our hymns, perhaps we hear sermons about it in church.

At its most literal sense, grace simply means 'gift' – that which is freely given. So when we talk about God's grace, we mean that part of the way we understand God is that God's spirit is always on offer, always freely available, it doesn't have to be earned.

Now, this is an exciting, radical idea. This is not how the world we live in works, is it? Usually, the things we want, the things we ask for, the things we don't yet have but want to have...usually, they cost us something. If you are in the supermarket, and would really like a bar of chocolate, somebody has to pay for it. Perhaps you are able to persuade someone you are with to pay, or perhaps you have to reach into your own pockets and hope to find a few coins.

If you want to buy a house, get a new car, go on holiday, get a new haircut, join a new gym, buy a new t-shirt, get a few toys, begin a Netflix subscription or upgrade your laptop – if you want to do any of these things, someone has to pay. We have to find the money to pay for them.

Sadly, sometimes this works with other human beings too – people won't help us out unless they think there is something in it for them, people don't always volunteer their time or energy unless they can see the benefit for them too. Of course, this isn't always the case, and we worship a God who embodies a different way of being – a way of living that is about grace. A way of living that stops trying to work out what things cost, and how we benefit from them, and give freely to those in need.

In the Bible, we read the Jesus stories, which are there to show us a way to live by grace. Jesus appears not to have worried about costs and expensive things, but spent his life giving from what he had, and receiving the gifts of others. Can we do the same?

Today, and in the week ahead, I want us to think about how we can be people of grace. We are going to spend a moment now, sharing with one or two people sitting near you, about how we might be able to do that. Just in small groups, reflect on how you might be able to be a person who gives, rather than always looking to exchange. Is there something you own that you might like to give away to someone who needs it more?

Is there some money you could donate to support a charity that matters to you? Could you give up your time to help someone, perhaps with a phone call, arranging to see them, or helping them with a task that needs to get done? Just talk together for a few minutes, then we'll hear some of your ideas – how can we be people who practice grace?

[Give people a minute or two to do this, then see if anybody wants to share with the whole congregation. When the conversation reaches a natural end, announce the next hymn].³

Hymn:

657 STF – You give rest to the weary OR

250 STF – Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult

Readings: Acts 9:1-6; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Hymn:

293 STF – All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord OR

462 STF – Come with me, come wander

Reflections on the reading

A few years ago, I was a regular member of a pub quiz team with a group of friends. I am truly terrible at pub quizzes and was there really to make up the numbers. Every week, without fail, I'd sit there for two hours and never, ever got any questions right. I used to say that if only we got a question on Charles Dickens I'd finally come into my own – a subject I felt was my speciality. Finally, one memorable week, the question I'd been waiting for came: "what year was Charles Dickens' first novel published?" I still remember the sinking feeling now as my friends looked at me expectantly, and I realised, with horror, that I couldn't remember the answer. I scabbled around in my head for a few fleeting moments of panic, and then took a guess that turned out to be way off. My friends have never let me forget it.

Can you think of a time you've failed at something you thought you were good at? That's exactly what happens to Peter in today's Gospel reading. He says to his friends, "I am going fishing", and they go out together in the boat, but catch nothing. In the midst of his grief, Peter returns to something familiar, something he's supposed to be good at, and yet it turns out even his old skills are letting him down.

Peter must have been feeling sad, confused, ashamed and exposed. Jesus, the person he has loved and followed, is dead – or is he? Jesus has appeared to the disciples already, but perhaps these appearances left them baffled, as well as jubilant. And maybe for Peter, ashamed that he denied Jesus, the notion that Jesus is alive and likely knows about his denial is not altogether comforting. Maybe he feels like a fraud amongst the other disciples, underserving of his place in their community. Well, if he doesn't have what it takes to be a disciple, at least – he thinks – he can always go back to his fishing.

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

When Peter says “I am going fishing” he is returning to his old and familiar way of life. He is going back to business-as-usual, to a life before he first encountered Jesus. But he is forgetting that his journey with Jesus has already changed things for him – and will continue to change things for him. So when he glimpses Jesus on the shore, he has a choice. Does he stay in the boat and choose disappointment, shame, despair - the old ways – or does he move towards Jesus and choose redemption, forgiveness and a new way.

When we are feeling sad, confused, ashamed or exposed how often do we fall into old familiar patterns that enforce our sense of failure, that compound our loneliness, that solidify our shame? Like Peter, we have a choice – and it's the choice of new over old, life over death, light over darkness.

It's the same choice we see Saul facing on the road to Damascus in our reading from Acts today. He can listen to the voice of Jesus and get up and move towards the light of forgiveness and a fuller life of serving God. Or, he can continue to choose to perpetrate persecution and injustice – he can choose to stay in the darkness. In our lives too, we are often caught in moments like this, where we can choose to follow a path of life or we can choose the opposite. Sometimes in small choices, like the ways we speak and listen to others, or sometimes in large choices, like the ways we might hurt others.

The exchange between Peter and Jesus by the charcoal fire on the beach is intended to remind us of another exchange by a different fire. On the night of Jesus arrest and crucifixion, Peter stands at a charcoal fire in a courtyard and denies Jesus three times before a cock crows. Two fires, two moments in Peter's life: one where he chose denial, one where he chose love. One is a fire stoked by fear and betrayal; one by reconciliation and forgiveness. One sparks with shame and wrong choices; one with opportunity and commissioning. One blazes with the worst of humankind; one fuels the furnaces of the Kingdom.

In our own lives we will have moments where we have huddled at both these firesides. We will also have moments of fruitless floating in a fishless boat on a dark sea. And moments of losing our heads in delight as we dive partly clothed into the ocean. And moments of unexpected breakfasts with friends we thought were long-lost, in the light of a new day.

Look back at the firesides of your lives, and the shorelines and the open water. Where do you notice the presence of Jesus? Where did you choose to move towards Jesus?

Peter learns that he cannot simply go back to the way things were. When Peter feels caught out by his own denial, he returns to what he knows best. But it turns out in fact that what he knows best is not how to fish, but how much he loves Jesus. Even fishing, his trade and craft, cannot save him from his shame – he cannot stake his life on it, instead, he must stake his life on the only one worthy of such a stake. Peter's vocation is not to be found in the night time of his old life, but in the new dawn of taking up Jesus' call to follow him. In choosing the way of Jesus, the way of love and forgiveness, things will change for him. His encounter with Jesus demands it.

The love that he professes three times to Jesus on the beach is the kind of love that is life-changing. It's a risky kind of loving that takes courage, that disrupts the way things were, that defies business-as-usual, and that is more powerful than shame or regret or fear.

Whether on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius or on the road to Damascus, these encounters with Jesus cause life-changing shifts for our Biblical heroes. Both are forgiven, both are commissioned for a new ministry. It turns out that we can't encounter such a love as Jesus without things changing for us.

Like Peter, we are called forwards, faithfully into God's future, away from our familiar ways – ways which allow us to wallow in our own shame or failure, ways which feel like safety but ultimately are destroying us. We are called forwards into fullness of light, and life, and love.

Paul's zeal for mission would be exhausting for him, if it were not rooted deeply in this life-changing experience of redemption and forgiveness – in this transformative encounter with the blinding light of love. Our own endeavours in mission and evangelism too will be exhausting and dispiriting if we are not rooted in and resourced by our encounters with Jesus.

In our reading from Revelation today we get a vision of that future, where every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, sings praises to Jesus Christ. This is the Kingdom come, the promise of all things made new fulfilled.

In our own lives we can glimpse the reality of God's Kingdom come as our muck-ups are forgiven, and our mess-ups are redeemed by love. This is the good news of the gospel, and these moments are our testimonies - the times we have noticed the presence of Jesus with us and the ways this has changed things. Can you think of times in your life where you've glimpsed the goodness of God?

These times give us a new vision for our future. They resource us for serving God. They affirm our calling. They teach us that our God is one of surprises, and being a follower of the way of Jesus will take us to unexpected places and leave us changed. And these times should serve as a reminder to us, that if we don't follow as faithfully as we might, the gift of grace means that Jesus will meet us afresh in the light of day, with the simple invitation to "follow me". How will you respond to Jesus' invitation today?⁴

Hymn:

673 STF – Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? OR

367 STF – When I was lost you came and rescued me

⁴ Reflection written by Holly Adams

Prayers of intercession

God of the fireside, we pray for your Church.

Forgive us for the times we are so caught up in fear that we forget to testify to your goodness. Give us courage to step into mission with you, to serve as you commission us, using the gifts you have given us to proclaim our love for you, to transform our lives and communities and to build your Kingdom here on earth.

We ask: God of the fireside, forgive us.

God of the open water, we pray for those facing unimaginable struggles this day.

We pray especially for those in places of war, who mourn, who seek refuge. We ask that you provide for them as abundantly as you provided fish for the fishermen on that resurrection morning. Be with all who suffer, may your peace and love enfold them and may they discover new hope and strength and purpose.

We ask: God of the open water, provide for us.

God of the shoreline, we pray for ourselves.

Help us to step into the forgiveness and mercy you offer us. Help us to notice all the ways you are present in our lives, open our eyes to see you in the faces of those we meet and in the beauty of creation and community. Help us to live lives changed by your goodness as we seek to follow you with faithfulness and songs of delight.

We ask: God of the shoreline, call us.

God of the new world, we pray about all the ways we have broken your world.

We ask your forgiveness for the times that we and our leaders have chosen a path of destruction, denial, or greed. We ask for your renewal in our own hearts, and in all of creation. May systems of injustice and oppression be overthrown and may we and our global leaders make better choices rooted in love, care, and protection of all life.

We ask: God of the new world, renew us.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

Gracious God, for all we have received, we say thank you.

As we leave the fireside and head out, to be and make disciples, help us to use these gifts – the gifts of money and the gifts of each and every one of us – to build your kingdom here on earth.

Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Holly Adams

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Hymn:

358 STF – Let heaven and earth agree OR

313 STF – Thine be the glory

Blessing

Thine be the glory, risen and conquering son.

Thine be the glory, in the week ahead, in the small things and the big decisions that we make.

Thine be the glory, Lord Jesus as we seek to follow you, today and every day.

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker