

twelvebaskets



EASTER 4C

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

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Easter 4 - Year C
8th May 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

548 STF – Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine OR

18 STF – Be still and know that I am God

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

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

247 STF – I danced in the morning when the world was begun

Readings: Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; John 10:22-30

Hymn:

306 STF – Now the green blade rises from the buried grain OR

626 STF – Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

256 STF – When I needed a neighbour, were you there? OR

312 STF – The head that once was crowned with thorns

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

297 STF – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing OR

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

Blessing

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Call to worship

God who is both good shepherd and almighty Creator,
God who is Father and Mother,
God who is Spirit and Christ,
Three in one,
We bring ourselves in worship this day.
Show us how to walk in your way.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

548 STF – Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine OR
18 STF – Be still and know that I am God

Opening Prayers

Lord, you are the good shepherd,
Caring for your flock with an abundance of love.

We thank you for your tenderness;
For providing rest when needed,
Strength when called upon,
Resilience when pressed,
Compassion when moved,
Constant companionship whilst we navigate life,
Encouragement when disappointments arrive,
Direction when we stumble,
Hope when we despair,
Joy after grief,
Forgiveness and redemption.

You are the good shepherd,
Bringing your flock to safety.
Bringing us into relationship with you.

Surely your goodness and love will follow us all the days of our lives.

We press on with the hope of eternity with you.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

All Age Talk

Lots of people have attempted to summarise everything about being a Christian in a few words – perhaps if you can't think of anything else to do in the rest of the service, you might like to have a go at it yourself!

However, I'd like to suggest one possible summary of the whole Christian faith: 'You are loved'.

There you go, three short words, and it's probably not good enough – because it doesn't mention God, or sin, or Jesus, or penal substitution, or the Holy Spirit, or grace, or a million other things that people would want to include in their sentence. But it works for some people – because it helps us to hear those three words: 'you are loved'.

We live in a world where, sometimes, it is easy to forget that we are loved. There is so much pressure on us to be better, the adverts on TV, the articles in magazines, things other people might say or the jokes they tell can all make us feel like we are not good enough.

Perhaps it is an advert for new clothes, which only works if it makes us feel like the clothes we currently own aren't good enough – that is how the company will persuade us to buy new ones.

Or perhaps something that one of our friends or someone from our class, our workplace, our community says. They might not mean to be offensive, but they have their own worries and insecurities and in trying to protect themselves, they put us down, or say something negative about something that matters to us. It is easy to forget that we are loved.

But God loves us, no matter what. And an important part of the Jesus story is inviting us to recognise that – to see that God is close, God is with us, God loves us, just as we are.

In order for us to respond to what it is that God is calling us to do, it is important that we hear that message of love. We act, not always from a place of feeling guilty, but of feeling loved. The first thing God is calling you to be, is you.

Tim Minchin, the Australian singer, has a song called 'Not Perfect'. If you haven't heard it – I suggest looking it up. This song is his reflection on the importance of loving himself, even though he recognises that he is not perfect. The verses reflect firstly on the whole earth, then his country, his house, his body and finally his brain. He recognises that each of these is 'where I spend the vast majority of my time. It's not perfect, but it's mine'.

Perhaps we can come to the same realisation about ourselves? We are not perfect, but we have been created by a loving God who loves and accepts us just as we are. Can we learn that lesson again today? God is saying to each of us: 'you may not be perfect, but you are mine.'

'And you are loved'.³

Hymn:

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

247 STF – I danced in the morning when the world was begun

Readings: Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; John 10:22-30

Hymn:

306 STF – Now the green blade rises from the buried grain OR

626 STF – Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

Reflections on the reading

Last week, I was delighted to spend an-almost-balmy afternoon on the top of Ilkley Moor at the Cow and Calf Rocks. You may have heard of the rock formation or seen the spectacular views over the Wharfe Valley for yourself. In today's Old Testament reading (arguably one of the most well-known pieces of scriptures), we read about a valley; the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Now I'm pretty sure it wouldn't have looked like the Wharfe Valley as it's located on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and King David, who started out as a humble shepherd, would probably have been familiar with this valley during various stages of his life.

This all got me thinking about the metaphorical valleys we travel through during our lives. The valleys which, especially at the time, may be viewed as the difficult seasons. The times when our lives become over-shadowed by despair, defeat, or discouragement.

For some of us right now, we may feel as if we are right at the bottom of a particularly valley; its frightening and lonely being in the thick of it. Or perhaps you're coming out of a valley and sense a glimmer of light and some relief. For others, you may be supporting someone close to you who is going through a valley-time and you find yourself in the role of the light-bearer as you try as you hold out the candle of hope.

As I reflected on these seasons in my own life and others, I was firstly reminded that valleys don't discriminate on grounds of age, race, sex, gender, disability or sexual orientation for example. At some stage in all our lives, probably more than once, we will encounter personal or collective valleys. Just like mountaintop experiences, valleys are part of life. As Jesus himself said; 'In this life you will have trials and tribulation'. The Psalmist also reminds us, "The good do not escape all troubles—they have them too...'. But, and there is a big BUT here; "But the Lord helps him in each and every one" (Psalm 34:19 TLB). And this is the second reminder.

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

The Good News is you and I don't have to rely on escapism, denial or wishful thinking in such times. The Good News, and especially when we find ourselves in the valley, is we are not alone; the Good Shepherd is with us and in trust and faith, we are called to listen to His voice and follow Him (John 10:27-28).

When I am with my nieces in the park, we often try and 'catch' one another's shadows by trying to jump on them. But the minute you look back in the direction of the sun- to the light- you lose the shadow and their outlines 'magically' disappear. It might be obvious to point out, but we can't have a shadow without light.

When we are in the Valley of the Shadow it may feel dark and hopeless. However, the fact there are shadows, reminds us that God, in Jesus the Light of the World, is with us. And therefore, one of the keys to overcoming our fears and stepping out of the shadows is to keep looking towards Him. As we keep our eyes on the light and keep following His call, the shadows begin to fade.

So, I want to suggest that in the midst of our fears and worries, we need to be intentional as to who we are following and what we are listening out for. If we keep focusing on our fears and worries, or on comparing ourselves to other people who are 'managing better than us', we are probably going to feel worse rather than better. In fact, our fears will probably magnify like the fear children have of monsters under the bed.

Therefore, I want to suggest in the words of the Jesuit theologian Walter Burghardt, we need to take time to pause, to rest in God's presence and take a 'long, loving look at the real'. This is not to say that some of our concerns, worries and fears are not real. I love how God knows we are human and fear is a human response. Why else would God when addressing his prophets, or sending angels to shepherds at the birth of Jesus or to women at the empty tomb begin by saying 'Don't be afraid!'?

However, as Christ's disciples, we can find ways to look at those obstacles and fears clearly by bringing them in to the open, perhaps with a trusted friend or safe person. We can bring them in to the light in prayer by being about our fears and concerns and in confidence knowing the Good Shepherd doesn't condemn us but hears us, cares for us and refills us.

And finally, when we remember how God takes 'a long, loving look' at us, we can find safety, comfort and courage to face the path ahead. For God is faithful; both on the mountain tops and in our valleys. Amen.

Let us pause, and have some time of quiet reflection, where we can ponder these questions:

- How can you be reminded of God's goodness when we walk through the valley or when supporting someone else who is going through a valley season?
- In what ways can you keep focused and attentive to the voice of the Good Shepherd?

[You might like to have a few minutes of conversation to hear people's reflections on these two questions].⁴

Hymn:

256 STF – When I needed a neighbour, were you there? OR

312 STF – The head that once was crowned with thorns

Prayers of intercession

Living God, we thank you that in Jesus you have given us a Good Shepherd who is faithful and loving.

We thank you that by your Spirit, you strengthen us to walk the way of the Good Shepherd. Today, we commit our lives afresh as we walk in His footsteps and listen attentively to His voice.

Eternal God, we thank you for the gift of life and life everlasting. For ourselves and for the whole of your creation, grant us new life and hope. Help us to trust in your promises especially when we face obstacles and enemies.

We pray for those who feel burdened by life and who can't see a way out. We pray for those who are walking in new lands and in uncertain territory. For those who are sacred and vulnerable. Renew in them a deep trust in you and calm their fears.

For those who support others and for those who feel weary and restless, we ask that you fill and sustain them with your comfort and endless goodness.

For those guiding others; those in local, national and global politics and business; for those in leadership roles in your Church, we pray they will look to you for guidance and wisdom.

God of Peace, in all our troubles, we hold fast to the promises of your Son. We thank you for Jesus Christ who has overcome this world and conquered death. We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace for peace in our hearts, in our homes and throughout the world this day and always.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁴ Reflection written by Caroline Ryder

⁵ Prayers of intercession by Caroline Ryder

Blessing the offering

God of peace,
Thank you for the gifts we have received.
Bless these gifts, that they might be put to use to care for those in need, spread hope
and joy, and bring peace to your world.
In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.⁶

Hymn:

297 STF – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing OR
255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

Blessing

Let us go out in peace,
Seeking your kingdom of justice and joy,
Praying for a better world
And playing our part in bringing it about.
Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker