

twelvebaskets



EASTER 5C

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

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Easter 5 - Year C
15th May 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

25 STF – God is here! As we his people OR

678 STF – Come, all who look to Christ today

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

258 STF – You are the Vine, we are the branches OR

86 STF – Praise the Lord! You heavens, adore him

Readings: Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

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

99 STF – All creatures of our God and King

What are you being called to?

Hymn:

35 STF – The trumpets sound, the angels sing OR

738 STF – There is a new heaven; there is a new earth

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

171 STF – Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes OR

313 STF – Thine be the glory

Blessing

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Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on www.theworshipcloud.com.

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Call to worship

Here we are, O Lord,
Still our minds,
Open our hearts,
Renew our bodies,
And give us strength, by your Spirit,
To worship you this and every day in our singing, our praying, and our living.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

25 STF – God is here! As we his people OR
678 STF – Come, all who look to Christ today

Opening Prayers

God,
Who dwells among his people,
Declares that there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

We are sorry for the times when we have forgotten to care for all you have given us.

God, who chooses to be with your people,
Promises that every tear will be wiped,
There'll be no more mourning or death, crying or pain.

We silently name the losses we feel.

God, who promises that everything will be made new,
The old shall pass away.

We hold onto the hope in your promises and trust in you,
The Alpha and the Omega,
The beginning and the end,
The water of life.

Refresh us today, we pray.

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

Let us use our imagination to picture ourselves amongst the gospel story that we will hear later in our service.

Gaze on the supper table. The meal is over, the table strewn with crumbs, the cups empty, and the plates greasy. The feast is finished and the disciples are tired. They are all anxious after they have been warned of betrayal, and confused by Judas' rapid departure. Surely now is the time to go home? But gaze on Jesus. He has so much still to tell them, and he is only just getting into his stride! In John's Gospel we find Jesus embarking on a speech that lasts for another five chapters.

Listen to Jesus talk of the glory of the Father and the gift of the Spirit and the imperative of love that this holds for us all. For everything is summed up in two short verses: 'Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another'.

Consider what this new commandment is saying to you now, in your situation today. What changes should you make to your attitudes, habits and behaviour, so that you may grow in love for another? Who in your life do you find it difficult to love? Think about the tension and criticism in our neighbourhoods today, as we struggle to learn to live with diversity. Consider how Jesus always welcomed the stranger.

Consider the difference between spontaneous love and deliberate love. Jesus was not expecting a wave of uncritical delight to wash over us, and make us pleased to be in everyone's company, equally at ease with everyone in our school or workplace, and open to the pleasures of every member of our extended family. He did not expect us to never again feel the grit of irritation.

Such spontaneous love only occurs a few times in our lives – for our children, who can do no wrong; for our lovers (at first); for a few precious friends.

But most of our loving must be of the other kind – a willed love that is related to duty, but carried out gladly because we are God's servant as the other is God's child. Such love makes us aware that we are no longer the centre of our small universe, and we become determined to put the other first, to respond to their needs and take their hopes seriously. This is a hard and difficult love to express and requires all the gifts of the Holy Spirit to achieve. Consider what they are: patience, encouragement, mercy, service and giving chief among them. Consider what gifts you have, and what gifts do you need to pray for?

Contemplate the way Jesus loved his disciples as individuals – ambitious James and John, vacillating and cowardly Peter, questioning Thomas. But he never gave up on them. Contemplate the strangers and beggars and lepers he greeted and treated; imagine their ugliness, their stench, yet Jesus cared for them. Contemplate the paradox of the Christian way, how it was that God the Father could be glorified by the crucifixion of the Son.

Let us pray.

Glorious God, I am called to imitate the great love Jesus had for his disciples,
A love that was only possible through his love for you.
Fill my heart with this love and strengthen my will
To love the difficult people in my life and those that I fear.
Help me share love in the wasted places of this world,
For I long to be known as your disciple.
Amen.³

Hymn:

258 STF – You are the Vine, we are the branches OR

86 STF – Praise the Lord! You heavens, adore him

Readings: Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

Reflections on the reading

Acts is a book of Fresh Expressions. It is the story of the birth and infancy of the Church. It contains many teething problems, but it also tells of growth, new discoveries, new understandings and new ways of building the relationship as God's people – a relationship with one another and, above all, with God.

And this story, in Chapter 11, is just one part of that growth, but it is a huge part, marking a dramatic step – one new fresh expression among many, but one which was to change the whole church. One man (Peter) has a vision. Another (Cornelius) has a conversion experience. And together, they come to a startling realisation – that God's grace, God's love, God's gift of the Holy Spirit are not to be hugged close and do not belong to one nation or one religion, but can be poured out on anyone. From the distance of 2000 years, that might seem obvious, but not at the time. At the time, it was so shocking, so radical, that Peter is summoned by his fellow Church leaders, to explain himself.

From that 2000-year distance, we often read this as though Peter alone realises the truth and has to persuade a reactionary, unspiritual Church Council of what should be blindingly obvious. But let's look again at the story...

One man has a conversion, and another (helped by a vision) realises that the conversion is genuine. He responds to the evidence in front of him, and his new insight, by baptising Cornelius, just as he would a Jewish believer. But the other church leaders weren't there. They haven't seen what Peter has seen; they haven't shared in his vision; they haven't experienced the outpouring of the Spirit on a Gentile household. They are people willing to accept new understandings of God's activity, or they wouldn't be Jesus-followers, but they naturally have questions... So, the Church listens to Peter's story. They ask their questions. They test his new understanding against what they know and have heard of God's nature. And, in the end, they find that they can reach only one conclusion – that God's grace is wider

³ Taken from Gazing on the Gospels Year C by Judith Diamond (SPCK)

than even they had realised! They give their blessing to what he has done, and they celebrate this new awareness, with rejoicing and gratitude!

From the distance of 2000 years, all this seems obvious. We cheer for Peter and shake our heads at the initial unbelief of the rest. And yet... I wonder how readily we follow the same pattern. Faced with a new way of worshipping, a newcomer to church who brings a different set of assumptions, a different way of Christian living adopted by a new generation or community, do we respond as the Jerusalem leaders did? Do we listen, question, test and celebrate? Or do we too often tut, disapprove, retreat into the tried and tested? Our history isn't unblemished in this regard; wherever Europeans have taken Christianity, we/they have taught that 'our' ways are proper and 'your' ways are to be abandoned. In our worship, we use language, gestures and rituals that can leave the newcomer bemused and alienated. We assume knowledge of prayers, behaviours and Bible stories, with the result that we mark out the 'insider' from the 'outsider'.

And Cornelius wasn't introducing a few new worship songs, or a youth club who might scuff the paintwork – or even just a new way of expressing the Gospel. He represented an entirely new worldview! His baptism changed not just his life, and that of his family, but the whole identity and life of this embryonic community of Jesus-followers. It wasn't even that he was allowed in on condition that he adjust to the expectations of the previously exclusively Jewish community; he wasn't asked to get circumcised, or to convert to Judaism. Instead, his baptism was allowed to change not his identity, but the church's expectations.

We're still in the Easter season, so we should be expecting stories of renewal, new life, new beginnings – new creation. But sometimes, perhaps, we read them solely as things that *have* happened, not as things which *are* happening, and will continue to happen. Revelation 21 tells of another Fresh Expression – Fresh Expression of Creation. It promises us, not just that Jesus' resurrection *has* brought about new life, but also that God *will* make all things new. The call is to expect renewal, rebirth, re-creation – because that's what God does! God makes all things new. God restores life and brings comfort. The passage from Revelation points to a hope-filled future, that begins and ends with God, the Alpha and the Omega.

When we look back at the stories of the past – of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, of the birth of the Church, of the lives of the early Christians – we are not looking back just to remember and commemorate something which is past. We're looking back in order to understand more of the nature of God. And the nature of God is unchanging. God was then, and is now, a God who makes things new. That's the beauty of the Gospel – the only thing that remains the same is God, because God keeps making all things new. That is the outpouring of God's transforming love; it's the action of God's forgiving grace; it's the whole story of Easter. God makes all things new. The God who surprised the Church in those early days is the same God who surprises us now, with astonishing revelations of the depth and breadth of God's love – if we're willing to be surprised! While we are busy looking to the past and hanging on to our favourite traditions, God is shaping tomorrow, offering us new birth, new beginnings, new growth, new hope... But we need to buckle up for the ride, because it's rarely smooth, and rarely easy. It's an adventure, not a gentle stroll.

But we're not alone. We look back in order to understand our present, and what we find is that Jesus offers us the resources for the adventure – we're nearly at Pentecost, when we will celebrate that outpouring of the Spirit that came upon the twelve, upon several thousand, upon Cornelius, upon so many more... and comes upon us. And we find that Jesus offers advice, given to his first followers and still valuable for those who follow him now. Amongst many precious nuggets of advice, one of the most valuable is surely the one from our Gospel reading today – so important that it comes three times in just those few verses: "Love one another." It is love which will hold us together through the turbulent times. It is love which will open our hearts to welcome those whom we might have thought of as 'outsiders'. It is love which will allow us to be changed, each time God surprises us. It is love which will open our eyes to new ways of understanding life, God, worship and grace. And it is love which will equip us for the radical transformation that God offers us.

- Peter wasn't just going with the flow, when he baptised Cornelius; he was changing the Church.
- The leaders in Jerusalem weren't just accepting the obvious; they were changing the Church.
- Jesus wasn't telling us just to be nice to one another, but to love, because love will change the Church.

And when we join in that adventure, allowing ourselves – our worship, our understanding, our faith – to be changed by God, through others, then we become a Church that not only is willing to change, but which will participate in God's plan to change the world!

Buckle up indeed, because the adventure may be hard, it may be frightening, it may challenge us and disturb us. But it will also transform us! And it will make us into surprised and surprising followers of Jesus, through whom God will transform the world.

"And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'" Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!⁴

Hymn:

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy OR
99 STF – All creatures of our God and King

What are you called to?

Here we have some questions, for reflection in small groups. So take a few minutes to think over these questions together.

- What needs to change in your life, or the life of your church?
- If someone of a generation / community / culture not represented in your church came next Sunday, what would surprise them? What would make them feel welcome? What might confuse them?

⁴ Reflection written by Catrin Harland-Davies

- Where is God calling you to do things differently? What voices within your community might God be speaking through, to invite you into new understandings of grace?

[You might then like to make space for people to feed back on the conversations they have had in small groups and offer any reflections in a short prayer of thanks for the conversation and the invitation to change and be challenged.]

Hymn:

35 STF – The trumpets sound, the angels sing OR

738 STF – There is a new heaven; there is a new earth

Prayers of intercession

God who makes all things new, we pray for new life.

For your creation, that you made and declared to be good,
that it may be restored and renewed,
and that we may care for it as you intended,
Creator, Re-creator God, we pray.

Silence

God of new life,

Restore and renew us.

For your peoples across the world,
that conflicts may end and relationships be restored,
and that a true, just and lasting peace may be sought,
Creator, Re-creator God, we pray.

Silence

God of new life,

Restore and renew us.

For your church, here in this place and around the world,
that divisions may be healed, strangers welcomed,
and that we may have boldness and courage to follow wherever you lead,
Creator, Re-creator God, we pray.

Silence

God of new life,

Restore and renew us.

For those suffering, in body, mind or spirit,
that those who fear the future may find hope,
those who long for the future may find joy in the present,
and those who recall the past with pain may find healing,
Creator, Re-creator God, we pray.

Silence

God of new life,
Restore and renew us.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

God of Grace,
Restore and renew us, and may we use these gifts to restore and renew others.
Show us how to play our part in the new life that is emerging around us,
Bless these gifts, and all of us, that our actions may enable resurrections in our homes, our communities, our world.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

171 STF – Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes OR

313 STF – Thine be the glory

Blessing

God of all grace,
We have received from you.
Now we head out into the world, knowing that all we have is gift.
May we use those gifts in your name.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession by Catrin Harland-Davies

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker