

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 18C

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

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Ordinary 18 - Year C
31st July 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

120 STF – We gladly celebrate and praise OR

103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

35 STF – The trumpets sound, the angels sing OR

685 STF – In Christ there is no east or west

Readings: Hosea 11:1-11; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

Hymn:

501 STF – Help us, O Lord, to learn the truths your word imparts OR

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

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

636 STF – O love that wilt not let me go

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

459 STF – Captain of Israel's host OR

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

Blessing

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Call to worship

Here we are Lord,
Gathered in this place to worship,
Connected with people who are worshipping all around the world,
Gathered by your Spirit.

Come amongst us, Lord Jesus,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

120 STF – We gladly celebrate and praise OR

103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him

Opening Prayers

God of all grace, you have given us so much,
All we have is gift and this day, as we pray, we celebrate that truth again.

Let us share the things we are grateful for – just shout out something that you want to say
'thank you' to God for today...

[Give the congregation time to share a few things – it might be helpful to repeat what people say into the microphone so others can hear].

Thank you – it is good to hear those little glimpses of thankfulness. We have so much to be grateful for, don't we? So, let us bring those 'thank yous' to God in prayer now.

Loving God, we are so thankful for all you have given us and all that you are doing in our lives. We offer up in prayer all the things that have been said out loud, and the quiet prayers of thanks we have said in our hearts and under our breath.

Thank you God and, most of all, thank you for loving us.

In our reading from Hosea today, we will hear about all the ways that the people of Israel were failing God. We too know that we have let you down, Lord God and in a moment of quiet, we bring our prayers of confession to you, Lord God.

[Pause]

Even as we confess and repent, we know that you have already forgiven and accepted us just as we are.

For that, and for all your blessings on our time of worship, we thank and praise you, O Lord our God.

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

Come Lord Jesus,
Come Holy Spirit,
Come and reign in our hearts today.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

What do you think the word 'potential' means? What are some of the first things that pop into your head when I say that word? Just turn to the person next to you and share what you associate with 'potential'.

[Give people time to do that, then take some of their suggestions].

It is quite a common word, 'potential', yet a really important one too. It is strongly associated with the idea of hope, with the idea that things can get better, that things can change. Martin Luther King famously said that "the arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice". What he meant by that is that it is easy for us to see setbacks and disappointments and feel that everything is getting worse, but there is always the potential for change.

Potential is a good Jesus word too, a 'gospel' word – it highlights the way that God cares about each one of us and wants us to live life to the full. Jesus talked about coming to earth "so that we might have life, and have it in all its fullness". That seems to suggest a belief in potential, in unlocking the very best within each of us, during this life.

Later in our service, we will hear some reflections on today's Bible readings from All We Can, the Methodist relief and development charity. The organisation's vision statement is "Every person's potential fulfilled" – not because they believe that it is their job, as one movement within the Methodist family, to bring out the very best in everyone on the planet. Rather, it is a recognition that God desires us to have the best life we can, and to do all that we can to ensure other people's potential is also fulfilled.

So today, and this week, in all that you might go through, in all the conversations you have, in all the people you encounter, can you live life to all its fullness and enable others to fulfil their potential too? What a world we could build, if we all lived like that...³

Hymn:

35 STF – The trumpets sound, the angels sing OR

685 STF – In Christ there is no east or west

Readings: Hosea 11:1-11; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Hymn:

501 STF – Help us, O Lord, to learn the truths your word imparts OR

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

Reflections on the reading

How easily distracted are you?

Are you someone who can sit and read a book in a noisy room, where other people are having animated conversations, or are you too tempted to look up and get involved or listen in?

Are you able to walk down a street without getting distracted by a shop that you like the look of, or are you already heading out of your way to 'see what they've got in there'?

Are you able to sit at your desk and crack on with work or do you get distracted as soon as you remember there is a sports game happening that you care about and you just want to 'check the score'?

If you've seen the beautiful Disney Pixar film, *Up*, you might remember the character of Doug: a dog who can (through some translation software) speak English. The human characters in the story get a unique insight into the mind of a dog, including the inherent distraction that comes when a dog spots a squirrel! At random moments, and in the midst of any other thought or conversation, if Doug sense a squirrel nearby, he simply barks 'squirrel' and runs off towards those most-chaseable-of-animals!

What about in your walk of discipleship – does any of this resonate? Are you able to stay focussed on what you are learning about God and God's love for you, or are you liable to get distracted at the drop of a hat? Many of us struggle to remain focussed on what it is that God is calling us to, and to the journey of seeking to follow Jesus. Our world and our society are full of distractions and pastimes that are designed to absorb our time and energy and – in most cases – our money too!

What are the things most likely to distract you?

And what is most likely to help bring you back?

What practices and rhythms work for you to help you return to your walk of discipleship?

Both our Old Testament reading and our New Testament epistle pick up on this issue of getting distracted and turning aside from God's desire in our lives. In Hosea, we hear the prophet's lambasting of the people of Israel for all the ways they have failed to follow God's instruction, for all the ways they have rejected Yahweh, even though their God has been faithful to them and freed them from so much oppression. Hosea appears to be reporting an attitude from God that – 'they would deserve to be in real trouble', but because God is gracious and generous, they won't receive the full punishment they deserve. This passage calls to mind one of the lectures in Biblical studies at Sheffield University – Hugh Piper – whose final lecture on the Old Testament used to involve his challenge to students to come up with one word to summarise the whole narrative of the Hebrew Bible. Dr Piper's own entry into the challenge was the word, 'nevertheless'.

Throughout the story of the Old Testament – God’s people fail to live up to the standards expected of them, but God loves them nevertheless. Heroes, champions and kings fail in their duty, but God uses them *nevertheless*. There is evil, brutality, violence, sin and a long list of mistakes, *nevertheless*, God’s will is done, God’s kingdom comes a little closer... I wonder – to what extent do you agree with Hugh Piper’s assessment of the Old Testament? Perhaps you can see echoes of that in your own life?

Then we come to Colossians – and again we see this same theme. Are we distracted by our ‘earthly nature’ or do we set our minds, our hearts, our lives on the things that are ‘above’ – the heavenly, the divine? It comes back to this same question – are we getting distracted?

To illustrate what this looks like, let’s turn to a real-life example. All We Can – an international development agency working on behalf of the church to help tackle poverty and see people’s potential fulfilled – is committed to working over the long-term. The organisation has pioneered what is called the ‘partnership approach’ or ‘partnership ethos’ as a way of relating to the communities and places where the work is carried out. All We Can doesn’t deliver projects in poor countries to help them tackle poverty. Rather, this work is about getting alongside people, communities and partner organisations so that they can thrive, so that they can come up with their own solutions to the problems they face, so that they can become all that they can. That’s not easy, and it’s not a ‘silver bullet’ approach that ‘fixes’ things overnight. It is lengthy, sometimes much more lengthy than simply delivering a new well or a new school or a new hospital.

However, All We Can remain convinced that is a gospel approach. Jesus’ ministry is relational and incarnational, not transactional. Jesus models a way of getting alongside people, understanding their story and listening to their voices that has often been overlooked when the church has sought to work in some of the places and communities where All We Can is now working, including Zimbabwe, Malawi, India and Uganda. Often, the church – and secular development agencies – have been guilty of assuming that the solutions lie in the west, and that what people need is a ‘quick fix’ – a new project, a new school, a new hospital...whereas All We Can’s work exemplifies a longer, slower, steadier, more sustainable and more loving approach. An approach built on walking together in partnership, over many years.

Our Western culture is often one that promotes self-aggrandisement and self-promotion (just think about the way social media works, for example: I post a picture of me doing something fun and successful, and I wait for other people to ‘like’ or ‘love’ or ‘retweet’ it). It becomes about me, about ego, about now, about instant, about quick-fix, about ‘putting on a brave face. Think of the man, with his barns, tearing them down to build bigger barns to house even more grain. I expect if he was around in 2022, he’d think those new barns would make a great background for an Instagram post, or a profile picture.

How can we be counter-cultural when that narrative is the norm? How can we advocate a different way of being which is about community, not self; about long-term, not quick-fix; about relationship, not ego?

That remains our challenge as Christians in 2022, but I believe we have much to learn from Jesus’ stories and the way he operated. At All We Can, this is a regular topic of conversation – how can these principles of relationship and partnership continue to be a key part of the way the work is done, even when that is no longer the norm? Being counter-cultural is difficult, especially as we seek to be relevant to the culture and society around us,

but Jesus knew he was 'in the world but not of it'. He understood the balance we now face.
Do we?

Are we up for the challenge?⁴

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real, in giving and receiving OR

636 STF – O love that wilt not let me go

Prayers of intercession

For our prayers of intercession, we hear a prayer for justice and peace written by a former staff member at All We Can. Let us pray.

Lord God, you have opened my eyes to the world around me.

Let these eyes not grow weary because of what they see:

war instead of peace,

despair instead of hope,

profit instead of prosperity,

want instead of need,

statistics instead of people,

destruction and pollution instead of nurture and growth.

I know your continual challenge to me: to pursue a life of justice and peace.

I know you have provided me the tools to make a difference.

Your message has lit a spark within.

Ensure that I will continue to look upon the people of the world as my neighbours

that I will not stay quiet as injustice continues

that I will not let hatred or despair win over love and hope

that I will not let your people become statistics that remove their humanity

that I will not sit by as your world is damaged beyond repair.

I pray that you will keep the fire burning within me.

Amen.

And a prayer for refugees from All We Can,

God creator of all,

For people who are displaced,

may they find a safe refuge.

For people who have lost control of their lives,

may they know a sure foundation.

For people who live in fear,

may they be given a strong fortress.

⁴ Reflection written by All We Can – if you want to find out more about their work and how you can get involved, visit allwecan.org.uk for opportunities to pray with them, volunteer and give.

For people who are disillusioned,
may they have hope in a future.

Loving father in times of crisis, sorrow and uncertainty
we ask that you draw near.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

Living, travelling God, we give you thanks for all we have received and the many blessings of the places we can call home or find safety. We commit these gifts to you and your kingdom, for your work and the building of a world where all people have a safe place to sleep at night.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

459 STF – Captain of Israel's host OR

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

Blessing

Go from this place, to seek justice,
Go out into the world, to play your part in seeing every person's potential fulfilled.
Go out and do all you can to make the world a better place,
In Jesus' name.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by All We Can

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker