

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 17B

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

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**Ordinary 17 - Year B**  
28th July 2024



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**372 STF – Come down, O Love divine OR**

**103 STF – God is love: let heaven adore him**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**61 STF – Our God is a great big God OR**

**243 STF – A rich young man came seeking**

Readings: 2 Samuel 11:1-15; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

**Hymn:**

**471 STF – Lord, I come to you OR**

**241 STF – When we were in the darkest night**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**718 STF – We lay our broken world OR**

**502 STF – I know that my redeemer lives, and ever prays for me**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling OR**

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

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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## Call to worship

Grace is here to welcome us,  
Christ is here amongst us,  
The Spirit moves by ways we do not know,  
And God comes close, closer than we can imagine.

Come close, Lord Jesus, close enough that we can feel your breath on our cheeks, as we worship you.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

372 STF – Come down, O Love divine OR  
103 STF – God is love: let heaven adore him

## Opening Prayers

God we come before you with our prayers,  
You meet us here just as we are,  
With hopes, fears and dreams.

We meet with you and we give thanks,  
Thanks that you know and love us,  
You love us amidst our fears,  
You love all we hide behind the masks we wear,  
When we are lost you find us and love us.

### **As God loves us, so let us love each other.**

Too often we are afraid, too afraid to live.

We live small, we forget Your wonder, Your abundance,  
We are sorry that we look inside for answers that limit us,  
That we lose our way and mess up.

We forget that in You we can find the strength and bravery we need.

Help us be brave,  
Help us appreciate Your abundant love,  
Help us look around us and see where our strength, bravery and love can make a difference.

### **As God loves us, so let us love each other.**

We thank you for the real, unconditional love you show us,  
You want us to be genuine, be ourselves, to live authentically.

To take risks and love generously.

We give thanks for the gifts of Your Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

Help us embrace your love, the gifts you have given us.

Help us live to our full potential,

To look around us,

To ask what we need to do to make this world a better place.

**As God loves us, so let us love each other.**

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

*Resources you need in advance: a ball of wool, a toy car or driving L plate, a pair of trainers (or pictures of all these things).*

*[Holding up the ball of wool]:* Who among us knows how to knit or crochet? How long have you been able to do that?

*Gather responses. Work out who has been doing this the longest and invite them up to the front to hold the ball of wool (or hold it aloft from their seat).*

*Holding the toy car/L plate:* Who among us can drive? Who took more than one test? Who had the most lessons to learn?

*Holding a pair of trainers:* Who is able to (and enjoys) running? Have any of you ever run any longer distances? 5km? 10km? Has anyone ever run a marathon?

Whoever has run the longest distance can be invited up to the front to hold the trainers.

What do these activities have in common? Knitting, driving, long-distance running? Gather responses from the congregation.

All of these skills took time to learn and develop. You cannot pick up a crochet hook and suddenly be able to make a blanket. You need to begin by learning the basic stitches and then progressing to putting them together before you can advance to following a pattern. You cannot change this ball of wool into something beautiful without effort and time.

It would be brilliant if we could wake up with the knowledge and skills to drive a car but sadly we cannot. We have to take lessons and learn the different functions and practice (a lot). It is a weekly or daily commitment to learn those skills. We cannot change these L plates for a proper licence without committing time and effort.

You hear about people who turn up to run a half marathon or marathon without any practice or training, and those stories rarely end well. Our bodies need training to be able to compete and endure. When you sign up to run a long distance race, you will need to make a running plan: a schedule of how you will begin and get to the finish line. You start with small distances and build up until the big day. To change and develop our bodies until they can survive running for long distances takes committing the time and effort.

All of these activities require the same things. What are they? Time and effort.

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<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Lorna Dobson

What is God calling you to change in your own life? What will require time and effort for you? Each of these people standing here or holding up the props from their seats have done something extraordinary. They committed to learning new skills and putting them into practice.

What are you being called to commit to? Might it take a while?<sup>3</sup>

**Hymn:**

61 STF – Our God is a great big God OR

243 STF – A rich young man came seeking

**Readings:** 2 Samuel 11:1-15; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

**Hymn:**

471 STF – Lord, I come to you OR

241 STF – When we were in the darkest night

**Reflections on the readings**

Take a moment to think of your favourite TV show, film or novel. Don't worry, you don't have to tell anyone so absolutely no need to choose something high brow in order to impress your neighbour. You might pick *The Lion King*, *Downton Abbey*, or *Gangsta Granny*. What is it that makes this your favourite? Music? The characters? The comedy? The adventure?

And what are the themes? What is it that runs through the story that makes it compelling and draws you to it? I'd bet that, even if they're not the primary reason that you love this story, there are two themes that are present: love and power. Am I right? Do love and power creep into the narrative, or perhaps underpin it?

NT Wright argues that in Ephesians 3, Paul is particularly interested in God's love and God's power, and this passage, from verse 14 to 21, is the prayer that 'brings it all together'. Perhaps love and power are the themes that bring all of everything together; they are forces that run through all of our lives and all of society.

This sermon was written in the week that Rishi Sunak announced a General Election in May 2024, and will be read in Churches just weeks after a new Government has formed. Don't worry, I'm not going to make any predictions, but I am going to ask you to look back at the campaigns that each political party ran throughout June. There is no question that the campaigns were all about power; who do you want to govern the UK? Who do you trust with this power? But it is also certainly about who and what we love and who has the power to protect, defend or enable that which we love. Perhaps now that we have a new Government, it is worth reflecting on what role love should play in the hands of our new Prime Minister and Cabinet now that they are in power.

The reading from 2 Samuel about Bathsheba and David show us what unbridled power can look like without love. David's lust for Bathsheba, as he sees her bathing, is coupled with a power as King that means he can act on his desires without thinking about the morality or consequences of his actions. Without having to think about a loving way to relate to his neighbour, Bathsheba, he exercises power over her body – the passage does not make it clear whether Bathsheba is a

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

consenting participant in what will occur between them - but it reads as though David doesn't really care either way. Not only does he exercise power without love over Bathsheba (although spoiler alert, David does eventually marry Bathsheba and she becomes a pretty bad-ass woman of court with the ability to strategise and influence), but he also exercises power over her husband Uriah.

There's some debate over whether Uriah is just a really good guy, who doesn't go to his wife because his soldiers are off in battle, or whether he is a very clever guy, wise to David's scheming, and foils his plotting intentionally. Regardless, it doesn't end well for Uriah – David sets in motion the events that lead to his death on the battlefield to avoid the awkward conversation about getting his wife pregnant.

In the context of reading 2 Samuel through the lens of Ephesians 3, I'd argue that David's actions are an example of great power without great love. The verses we heard today didn't include 2 Samuel 11 verse 27, which adds important context; "the thing David had done displeased the Lord."

John 6 offers us a counterpoint to a leadership in which power without love is displayed. David was a biblical leader who is heralded as a hero rather than a villain, but there are multiple accounts of him making morally dubious choices, usually because he has this unbridled power and forgets to be loving with it. The only example of true Godliness in human form is in Jesus, and John 6 gives us the perfect example of love and power balanced together in the feeding of the 5,000.

So much has been said about this passage of the Gospel, but today I am going to draw out three pointers that we might take from Jesus' actions about what love and power intermingled look like in practise:

"When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him... he said "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

Pointer number one: Jesus worried about other's needs and not just his own.

Jesus took the loaves and fishes from a boy.

Pointer number two: Jesus raised up the smallest among them with a teeny tiny offering and magnified this little boy's gifts.

"Jesus distributed to those who were seated as much [bread and fish] as they wanted."

Pointer number three: Jesus included everyone. Everyone got all the food they needed.

Could we ask our newly elected Government to govern by these three principles? How radically different would our politics and our nation be if those in power worried about other's needs, raised up the least amongst us, and included everyone so that each person in social got what they needed, regardless of their status?

And what about us? Paul is writing to the Church in Ephesians blessing them and praying for them:

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Paul is describing God's love in a way that suggests that it is so overwhelmingly huge it can only be felt rather than known. But Paul is also reminding us that grasping God's love is a power in and of itself. At this point it is helpful to remember that as we read scripture, we are a lot more like David than like Jesus; each one of us is called and loved and special. But each one of us is also deeply flawed and will inevitably make mistakes that hurt ourselves, and others, and will displease God. But that's the whole point; there is love in the way that Christ lived on earth, and there is

power in the resurrection. That power means that all our flaws and misuse of power and lack of love don't separate us from the vastness of God's love. Know that today; you are loved, and there is a great power in that.

May each one of us be blessed with the strength and wisdom to use our power in the way that Jesus did; to worry about others' needs, to raise up the least amongst us, and to include everyone in the love of God; to grasp just how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Amen.

Questions for reflection:

1. Do you think our nation would look different if our politicians exercised power rooted in love, how?
2. In this passage do you think David was a hero or a villain or something in the middle? What does it mean that all of us are flawed individuals who are all equally loved by God?
3. How do you think we'd all live differently if we had the power to grasp the magnitude of the love of God?

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

718 STF – We lay our broken world OR

502 STF – I know that my redeemer lives, and ever prays for me

### **Prayers of intercession**

(repeated two lines after the silence at the end each stanza could be used as a call and response):

Thank you God that you love us.

Thank you that you are a God of great power and great love.

Thank you for all the beauty and hope of your creation.

Thank you for the ways that is displayed in our lives, we leave silence here for each of us to give thanks for this:

*[silence]*

We give thanks for your love and power, God, knowing that:

**How wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ!**

Thank you for calling us deeper into love of you and of others.

Sorry God that too often we get it wrong.

Sorry for when we exercise power without love.

Sorry for when we prioritise love of ourselves in a way that is damaging to others.

We thank you for your forgiveness and for your Grace.

*[silence]*

We ask for your love and power to move in us, God, knowing that:

**How wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ!**

God we pray for our world

Broken and in pain, ruled by flawed individuals.

Bring peace and healing and joy, oh God.

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Lucy Zwolinska

We leave a moment's silence to pray for parts of the world that are on our hearts and minds today.

*[silence]*

We ask for your love and power to move in these situations, God, knowing that:

**How wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ!**

We pray for our community here and around us  
For those known to us and those unknown  
Show us how to express your perfect love and power  
And how to be loving neighbours.

We leave a moment of silence to pray for individuals in our community who we know need to feel your love and healing.

*[silence]*

We ask for your love and power to move in these individuals, God, knowing that:

**How wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ!**

We gather up all of these prayers giving thanks for the love of God that surpasses all understanding, but that is present amongst all of us this morning.

We ask for your love and power to move in us, God, knowing that:

**How wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ!**

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

### **We will now take up the offering.**

Accept these, our gifts Lord God.

May change begin with us, and may we take the ordinary, every-day things you have given to us, and turn them into something extraordinary, in your hands.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling OR

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

### **Blessing**

May God help us to turn our lives towards him,  
May he use us to transform the lives of those around us  
And join in with what the Spirit of God is doing already.  
May Almighty God bless you and guide you on your way,

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Lucy Zwolinska

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker