

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 25B

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

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **theworshipcloud.com**

Ordinary 25 - Year B
22nd September 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

609 STF – As we gather in your presence now OR

659 STF – As dawn awakes another day

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

633 STF – My soul finds rest in God alone OR

334 STF – Praise to the holiest in the height

Readings: Proverbs 31:10-31; Psalm 1; James 3:13 - 4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9:30-37

Hymn:

420 STF – Because you came and sat beside us OR

493 STF – Come, Lord, to our souls come down

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

266 STF – All the room was hushed and still

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you OR

409 STF – Let us build a house where love can dwell

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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

God of all grace,
Show me how to strive for justice – give me the energy and the courage to tackle all that is broken in my community, and the wider world.
As we come to worship,
Come amongst us, Holy Spirit, we pray

Amen.¹

Hymn:

609 STF – As we gather in your presence now OR
659 STF – As dawn awakes another day

Opening Prayers

Let us join in this prayer activity designed by our friends at All We Can.

When we pray together, our prayers get richer and deeper.

One-word prayers: Each person says one word of a prayer. E.g. person 1: 'Dear', person 2: 'Lord', person 3 'thanks' person 4: 'for'...etc. Do several rounds – to cover gratitude, awe and wonder and intercession.

Like the much-practiced way of telling a story where you go around a circle and one person adds a word at a time, you could say a pray like this too! It might go in unexpected directions.

When could you use a prayer like this?

What does it feel like to trust someone else to pray with you?

Thank you Lord, for blessing our prayer-time,
For giving us the words to say,
For forgiving, accepting and loving us,
Always, and by the amazing love of Jesus Christ,

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Let us learn a bit more about what it means to be a Justice Seeking Church!

The Justice Seeking Church report is a series of resources from the Methodist Church, written and coordinated by Rachel Lampard, and adopted by the Methodist Conference last

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can

year. Importantly, this work doesn't replace the church's ongoing commitment to justice and peace, born out of Jesus' earthly ministry and emphasised throughout Methodist history, right up to today. Rather, this piece of work hopes to help focus and gather our justice-seeking efforts together. To provide spaces where we can share together and achieve more. To help us ask and answer the question: what is mine to do?

This is the second in a series of five worship resources produced by The Vine, exploring each of the five priorities identified by the Justice-Seeking Church work, today's theme is **Opposing discrimination: all are made in the image of God**. Even if you are not leading worship or using The Vine in any other capacity this month, I do recommend looking up the other four in the series, or exploring the justice-seeking church pages of the Methodist Church website so you become familiar with the other priorities.

All humans are made in the image of God and are worthy of equal value and dignity. It's not just about avoiding injustice, but actively seeking peace and pursuing it, in all our relationships, in how we live our lives, and how we are following Jesus. We can change the way things work, if we do our bit...

Founder of Methodism, John Wesley recognised that the structures of society impact each person – for example the influence of rising grain prices on people experiencing poverty or the violent effects of colonialism – and he took a personal stand.

All these years later, the Methodist Church has an active and wide-ranging 'Justice, Dignity and Solidarity' work – which goes beyond 'equity and inclusion' to seek a deeper commitment to making sure everyone is welcome in our church, and that everyone isn't just surviving, but thriving.

How can you prioritise listening to the voices of people who are 'not like you'. People from different ages, ethnic groups, genders, sexuality, cultures, upbringing, class background... the list goes on!

Could our church screen the film *After the Flood: The Church, Slavery and Reconciliation* at your church and host a conversation about the implications of it?

What else could we do?³

Hymn:

633 STF – My soul finds rest in God alone OR

334 STF – Praise to the holiest in the height

Readings: Proverbs 31:10-31; Psalm 1; James 3:13 - 4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9:30-37

Hymn:

420 STF – Because you came and sat beside us OR

493 STF – Come, Lord, to our souls come down

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Reflections on the readings

“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mark 3:35). We hear those words so often, that sometimes I wonder whether we always hear just how startling they really are. But they leave me with a couple of questions...

Firstly, how does anyone ever get anywhere? I have an image of everyone standing politely outside an open door, urging one another: “No, no – you first.” “No, I insist, after you.”

And secondly, does motivation matter? Jesus is speaking of those who ‘*want* to be first’, so is it OK to put myself last as part of a carefully planned strategy to ensure that I end up first? So many theoretical questions, for me to tie myself in conceptual knots over, wondering whether I’m somehow missing the point...

But, as so often with Jesus, the visual illustration is helpful here. It gives me something to work with. Jesus chooses a child. In my world (though I recognise not all worlds), children often hold quite a central position – at the very least, we tend to want to prioritise care for children in both public policy and family life, even if we don’t always live up to the ideals we proclaim. But, in Jesus’ world in general, and this story in particular, I think the child represents the one who is often overlooked – including children, but also anyone, perhaps, whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Which will be all of us at different times but, if we’re honest, will be some of us more than others.

I wonder what life is like for the child in this story? How much freedom do they have, to say what they want or need, to assert their own personhood, or to shape their own future? Much may depend on the wealth and status of their family, but even (maybe especially) if they have the security of a family with a trade or land, they may not have much choice but to follow that path. And we’re not told the child’s gender – is this a boy, whose obligation will be to play his part in the family business? Or a girl, who will need to marry, bear children, and have relatively few rights when it comes to divorce, property or custody? I wonder if the child is disabled in any way? That would potentially severely limit their opportunities. And even if they’re not, the risk of illness or accident having a profound effect on their life chances is not trivial.

So the child’s place in the queue to get through that metaphorical door is shaped by so many things beyond their control, not least, just being a child. I wonder, then, what they would make of Jesus (or one of his disciples) stepping back, holding the door open, and saying, “No, after you.” What would be the impact of him deferring to them, giving way to them, honouring them?

This makes me think of another child in Mark’s Gospel. The 12-year-old daughter of Jairus, the synagogue leader. She is unnamed, but apparently loved and valued – and part of a comparatively wealthy family. And she is dying. And yet her father is kept waiting by the needs of a woman who, for the length of the little girl’s more privileged life, has been suffering from a condition that makes her an outcast. She is so completely unnamed that she isn’t even described as someone’s wife or daughter. And yet, Jesus stops for her, makes time for her, calls her ‘daughter’ and heals her. She doesn’t ask for his time – she just tries to touch his robe as he passes. And yet the desperate father and dying daughter have to wait, while she is valued. But by the end of the story, Jesus has made time for all of them, according to their need.

The fourth priority identified by the Methodist Church, in our quest to be a justice-seeking church, is ‘opposing discrimination’. And surely that’s a priority that should just be a baseline norm – not to love some more than others, or treat some as more valuable than others, because ‘all are made in the image of God’. But what does this mean in practice? As the story of the unnamed girl and the even more unnamed woman show, ‘opposing discrimination’ doesn’t actually mean we shouldn’t ‘be discriminating’ in how we give our

time and show our love. It doesn't mean treating everyone the same. Rather, it means treating everyone as infinitely precious and worthy of our time – seeing everyone as a priority, when – and in the way that – they need us. We show equality in the value we place on people, not necessarily in how we show it.

Again, I find myself tied up in complicated analysis if I'm not careful, but again, I come back to the simplicity of seeing a child in Jesus' arms. I have three teenage children. They are all equally precious to me, but all very different. They have different interests, different personalities, and often different needs. If one is ill, they will need my time, and the others may have to wait, but that doesn't mean that I love the others any less. If one is playing in a concert or a football match, or needs a lift back to university, or just needs someone to listen to life's woes, that may be my priority, but that doesn't mean the others are unloved or undervalued – it just means one needs me to show my love in a specific and practical way right now. We understand this at a basic level – it's called equity. Treating people not as if they are the same, but as if they have the same value.

James' Epistle deals with a number of practical issues, many of which sound fairly similar to the one Jesus was tackling among his disciples. We don't really know who 'James' is – it's one of those common New Testament names, like Mary or John, and it's hard to be sure which James we're dealing with here. But part of me likes to think this is James the apostle, remembering Jesus taking him and his fellow disciples to task for wanting greatness and power, and passing on that teaching. Earlier in the letter, he's challenged his readers over their discriminatory practices – giving a place of greater honour to those who appear to be of higher social standing. But now, he's tackling what is sometimes seen as the driver for equity – the thorny question of envy. Sometimes, calling for greater equity gets termed 'the politics of envy'; the implication is that it comes from resenting what some have and we don't.

Envy is, certainly, destructive; it destroys the one who is envious and the communities of which they're a part. But maybe the place to start, with equity, is not the luxuries that others have and we don't, but the simple things that we have but others don't. It may be money, power, time, a voice, loving relationships, or simply the ability to be content. That doesn't mean accepting unfair discrimination – not if we're on the wrong end of it, and certainly not when we see it harming others. But if we can hold together a generous offering of the good things we have with a passion for justice and equity – if we can sit light to the things we have but don't need, and aspire to a world where no one lacks what they *do* need – then perhaps we are on the way to helping to build a better world. Is this what Jesus called the 'Kingdom of God' – a community in which we simply cannot accept the idea that some are of more value than others? This might be a community in which we can all offer – and, perhaps more radically still, in which we can all receive what others offer. Sometimes, that's the greatest way to show that we value one another – to receive graciously the wisdom that comes from their own lived experience, the riches of their culture and identity, and the gift of their simple humanity and companionship.

Back to that metaphorical open door. If I'm standing there, holding it, who am I waiting for? For the one who normally waits until others have had their say, or their choice? For the one who is afraid of being rebuffed or elbowed aside? Or for the one who doesn't see why they'd be welcomed across the threshold at all? And why am I waiting? Because I want to make sure that, in putting myself last, I can be first, or because I see, beautifully, in the one coming last, the image of God?

Amen.⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Catrin Harland-Davies

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

266 STF – All the room was hushed and still

Prayers of intercession

God of justice, we pray for transformation in your world, holding before you those places in our country and around the world, where people are treated with less value because of who they are. Inspire, in the leaders of all nations, a longing to make a fairer and more equitable world.

[Silence]

God of mercy, we pray for transformation in your church. May this and all worshipping communities be places where all can find a welcome, know that they are valued and loved as who they are, and grow into the person that they could become.

[Silence]

God of compassion, we pray for transformation in the lives of those who are suffering. We ask for justice for those who suffer discrimination, for healing for those who need it, for peace of mind for those who are disquieted, and for restoration for those who feel unloved or excluded.

[Silence]

God of grace, we pray for transformation in ourselves. Give us courage to challenge injustice, compassion to recognise the suffering of others, humility to learn, generosity to share, and openness to receive.

[Silence]

Loving God, restore in us the wholeness of your image, and give us eyes to see your image in all whom we encounter.

May your Kingdom come and your will be done in all things.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

God of all grace,

Thank you for all you have done for me, and for each of us.

We come together, today, to worship you and to support each other,

But we also pray that you will help to use us, and our gifts, to build a better world, here in this space, and throughout the world,

In Jesus' name

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you OR

409 STF – Let us build a house where love can dwell

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Catrin Harland-Davies

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

Let us go out, to shape the future together,
Let us move forward from here, to build a kin-dom where all are equal, all are flourishing,
none are discriminated against.
And let that world of justice, begin with me,
In Jesus' name,
Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker