

# twelvebaskets



## LENT 3C

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

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

**Third Sunday in Lent - Year C**  
23rd March 2025



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**68 STF – Worship God with the morning sunrise OR**

**51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**429 STF – Lord, we turn to you for mercy OR**

**454 STF – Where shall my wondering soul begin?**

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

**Hymn:**

**633 STF – My soul finds rest in God alone OR**

**507 STF – O for a heart to praise my God**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**628 STF – Faithful One, so unchanging OR**

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

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**426 STF – Hark my soul! It is the Lord OR**

**425 STF – God of forgiveness, your people you freed**

Blessing

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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](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## **Call to worship**

Holy, holy Lord,  
Today we come into your presence,  
Seeking to worship you and encourage each other.  
Gracious, loving God,  
We come to meet with you and ask you to hold us in your love,  
This and every day,

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

68 STF – Worship God with the morning sunrise OR

51 STF – Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father

## **Opening Prayers**

Living, loving Lord,

This day, help me to sing your songs of praise,  
Help me to learn from Mary.

Help me to be open to being your humble servant,  
Willing to overcome my fears to follow you.

Help me to sing loudly of your love,  
And to shout boldly about the work of your hands.

Gracious, holy God,  
This day, help me to sing your songs of comfort and grace.

Help me to learn from Mary,  
Who, although young and afraid, gives herself wholly into your keeping.

Gives herself fully and allows the spirit to work in her and through her.

Help me to have the courage of the teenage mother to persist when giving up feels easier.

'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.'  
Give me a new song today. And set me free, from all my pain and guilt,  
Set each of us free to worship you,  
O God.

Give me vision for what is ahead, God of Wisdom,  
Hear our prayer.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

## All Age Talk

Today our passage refers to a fig tree. It's not the only time this is mentioned in the scriptures however, like every tree it has to start with a seed. So to begin with here's some interesting facts about seeds.

1. The largest seed in the world is the double coconut. It can measure up to 50cm (1.6ft) around the middle!
2. Seeds provide the world's daily food. Your breakfast cereal and toast, your pasta or pizza lunch and your rice dish for tea all started life as seeds from different grasses.
3. Some seeds found in frozen soil in Canada were grown and produced flowers – the seeds were thought to be more than 10,000 years old.

In today's Bible passage, Jesus tells a story about a fig tree that wasn't growing any fruit. But instead of giving up on it, the gardener used their voice to argue it should remain for a bit longer.

Jesus told a story about a man who had a fig tree in his vineyard. Every year, he looked for fruit, but there was none. He was ready to cut it down! But the gardener said, "Wait! Let's give it one more year. I'll take care of it, and maybe it will grow fruit."

This story is about God's patience. Just like the gardener didn't give up on the tree, God doesn't give up on us. In this season of Lent the Methodist Church is encouraging us with the theme Soul Food. This week we are being asked to think about how rest can help our souls.

So what can we learn from this seed that became a fig tree:

1. God gives us time to grow. Just like the fig tree, we don't always get everything right straight away, but God is patient with us.
2. We need to make the most of our chances. The tree was given one more year— what will we do with the time God gives us?
3. The gardener was not afraid to use their voice to speak up for the fig tree. Who are we going to speak on behalf of to ensure that their potential is not stamped on or indeed chopped down.

What kind of "fruit" will you grow this week from your soul?<sup>3</sup>

### Hymn:

429 STF – Lord, we turn to you for mercy OR

454 STF – Where shall my wondering soul begin?

**Readings:** Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

### Hymn:

633 STF – My soul finds rest in God alone OR

507 STF – O for a heart to praise my God

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

## Reflections on the readings

*“Somebody bring me some water; Can't you see I'm burning alive?”* – Melissa Etheridge, “Bring Me Some Water”, 1988

I first heard the song “Bring Me Some Water” by Melissa Etheridge in the late eighties shortly after it was released. I hadn't heard of her, but my brother had her first album, and I was intrigued - so I gave it a listen.

I loved it. Especially this song.

Being thirsty is something we can all relate to, and this is used often in poetry and songs as an analogy for other situations where we feel longing. Here, she was going through some personal turmoil and expressed it in this way. The song is emotional and powerful, it is a joy to listen to, and I was completely taken by it. She had gone off my musical radar over the ensuing 35 years, so it was lovely to be reminded of all of this this week.

Rediscovering this song, however, has also been a little painful for me. Some months after I first heard it, I discovered Melissa was gay. At that time in my life I was conditioned to dislike homosexuality, and sadly my personality was one that didn't keep this dislike a secret. I would mock and tell hurtful jokes amongst my friends, thinking it made me look cool. This is all very shameful and embarrassing, but I am pleased to be able to look back on that time and know that that is in no way how I feel now. I have changed – and this is a very good thing. I'm glad I was helped to change, and I'm glad I was able to change. Despite all this, it was good to be reminded how much I liked the song, the passion within it, and the feeling of “thirsting” for something as we might thirst for water in a desert.

Clearly it was our readings today from Isaiah and David that made me think about “thirsting” in the first place. They speak of thirst in similar terms and use how it feels to have a raging thirst, and also the sense of having that thirst quenched as a means to convey their message about God.

Our spiritual thirst is the urge we have to be better, to think clearer, to know ourselves more, and of course to feel closer to God. God is always moving closer to us, and in many different ways we “thirst” to know that more and more, and feel that sense of peace within us.

Somebody bring me some water... please...

In an apparently unconnected gospel reading, Luke tells of two different threads from Jesus' teaching and reports on the interactions with those around him.

Firstly, he is – as he often is - quizzed and tested by those who were trying to catch him out. Who “deserves” to die in these different situations? He is asked if people who do bad things deserve to die more than those who do not? What about those who are killed accidentally?

Jesus is clear. We all die the same death. Death is the ultimate leveller. The things we choose to do have no impact on this, and nor do the things that happen to us in life.

Jesus does however take the chance to refer to the process of repentance. Repentance can be such a heavy word often used to frighten us into submission, whereas in reality it simply means a change of heart, or maybe turning to look in a different, better direction. Here Jesus is offering a way to make “living” better – a plea to engage with the eternal life – that QUALITY of life - that Jesus offers us through a faithful relationship and through our knowledge and love of him and his teachings.

And so those who challenge him are once more left scratching their heads...

Next – he tells the famous parable of the fig tree, with a cast of characters of three. We have the vineyard owner who's had enough of the tree that is producing no fruit and wants

it chopped down. The gardener then comes along and suggests to him he might want to give it “one more year” to see if that fruit will be forthcoming...

Typically – Jesus doesn’t explain the who’s who of this story – so we are left with a number of options. Let’s consider some of them.

First of all, let’s imagine God is the angry and judgemental vineyard owner. He is venting his wrath on the tree that is not producing any fruit. There are then two scenarios here... maybe we have to see ourselves as the tree and we are the object of God’s wrath despite some people trying to give us a chance (the gardener) but ultimately it’s about an angry God and a shameful sinful “us”.

This is a typical and well-worn viewpoint and has caused lots of hurt and problems and created a brand of Christianity which is focused on judgement and our response to this angry God. I have never seen this as helpful – for anyone. It also strikes me as a huge reason why so many people are walking away from church.

Another scenario has God still as the owner, but this time the tree could represent the people in our lives that frustrate us by being lazy and not bearing fruit, and the parable challenges how we feel about that. Maybe we’re being encouraged to be patient and give folks another chance in the role of the gardener.

Fair enough, but I don’t find either of these scenarios particularly compelling. At least not for this week’s reading of the parable.

How about this?

We are the tree.

I don’t know about you, but I find this really easy to align with. When did you last feel unproductive? As you hear this question, Some of you may be reminiscing about years gone by, some of you might be thinking back to last week or looking at a calendar. Personally - I’m looking at my watch. I can easily relate to this picture of myself as a non-fruit bearing tree and can even think of times TODAY when I have felt less than productive!

So who is represented by the vineyard owner in this scenario? Maybe what, rather than who.

Maybe the pressure we feel to perform and the sense that we are being scrutinised and judged in this way comes from work pressures, our family obligations... or worse still – pressure from within our self. We so often tell ourselves we’re not good enough... not strong enough... not productive enough... or think that other people are thinking those things about us.

This of course leaves the role of the gardener – and maybe this is God. Here we can visualise a God who is patient and understanding. A God who values the tree for what it is not for what it is producing. A God who is keen to rake around in the roots of the tree, spread some fertiliser, and see what happens... give it some room to breathe. A God who shows grace and mercy to the tree. A God who knows the tree can and will flourish if it is given a chance.

A God who wants to grant “one more year”.

One more day?

One more month?

One more season?

One more decade?

One more lifetime?

A God who is always patient.  
Always gracious.  
Always loving.

When I think of THIS God... I kind of like to think he was probably fobbing the vineyard owner off with his “one more year” assessment. I reckon when that year is up he would be just as happy to give it another year... and another one... maybe as long as it might take for the tree to “find itself” and flourish.

We are the tree. Can we accept this offer of a second chance to see what might happen – not by trying to become what we think we ought to become – but instead to allow ourselves to breathe, if we have space to be our true selves, and see what beautiful fruit might start to be produced?

So are these seemingly unconnected stories actually more intertwined than we may have at first thought?

Our spiritual thirst to improve and move forward can only be fulfilled if we can have the graceful offer of room to breathe and be ourselves... to discover our beautiful, personal potential.

Our opportunity to repent and change the direction in which we’re looking can only be given by that loving God of grace who is always wanting to give us “one more year”.

I can look at my change of heart since first hearing that Melissa Etheridge was gay and feel that maybe I have been allowed to bear fruit. Can you think of similar situations in your own life?

More importantly, may we all be ready, willing, and open to allow the NEXT change of heart to take place within us, and truly have our deep, spiritual thirst quenched by a God whose love is more patient and gracious than we might dare to imagine?

I hope so.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

628 STF – Faithful One, so unchanging OR

416 STF – There’s a wideness in God’s mercy

### **Prayers of intercession**

As we pray today we will intentionally give ourselves some “room to breathe”.

I will say some short phrases as we think about the people and situations in the world and I invite us to take five slow breaths together as we ponder, and pray. Please do not worry about whether or not you’re in time with anyone else... do this in your own time...

Bring forward any names or situations into your mind as these words wash over you today...

Our world is at war in too many places. This conflict simply cannot be the way things should be. Whilst we feel so powerless, we pray into these situations and urge those with influence to bring the hatred and bloodshed to an end. We must stay hopeful.

*As we pray, let’s give ourselves room to breathe...*

The political climate can be so divisive and the discourse can be so personal and hurtful. We pray that politics be restored as a force for good in our home countries, and across the world.

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Kevin Dobson

*As we pray, let's give ourselves room to breathe...*

The profile of the Christian church is so different across the globe. Differing dynamics in attendance levels, scandals rocking the institutions, and faith seeming to be a distant prospect from more and more people. We pray that all that Jesus stood for remains a loud and clear message in all branches of society.

*As we pray, let's give ourselves room to breathe...*

Think about those who are at a disadvantage in life because of their circumstances. The poor, the weak, the marginalised, the persecuted. We have a direct echo here in the teachings of Jesus. Help us to search for ways to balance these situations in a fairer way.

*As we pray, let's give ourselves room to breathe...*

Can you take an opportunity to make someone feel better about themselves as you go about your daily business? If so, take it. Everyone wins in these situations.

*As we pray, let's give ourselves room to breathe...*

Think about those close to you, whether family or friend. Can you reach out and keep these connections alive. They are precious.

*As we pray, let's give ourselves room to breathe...*

Finally, its time to do what maybe doesn't come naturally and think about ourselves. Are you being kind and fair to yourself? Give yourself the emotional space to flourish and be the best version of you that there is.

*As we pray, let's give ourselves room to breathe...*

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

Living God, our parent and guide, we commend these gifts into your hands now. We are grateful for all you have done for us, the many blessings we have received.

Accept our money, but also our lives, energy, time and commitment – by your Spirit enable us to put these gifts to good use to bring the Kingdom closer.

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

426 STF – Hark my soul! It is the Lord OR

425 STF – God of forgiveness, your people you freed

### **Blessing**

Let us go out and seek a better world,  
Let us go with the Spirit of God in our hearts,  
And show God's love to the people we meet.  
In Jesus' name,  
Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Kevin Dobson

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

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