



ORDINARY 23C

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

Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C
7th September 2025



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

570 STF – As we gather, Father, seal us OR

30 STF – Jesus stand among us

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

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

564 STF – O thou who camest from above

Readings: Jeremiah 18:1-11; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Philemon 1:1-21; Luke 14:25-33

Hymn:

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

566 STF – Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace OR

768 STF – The peace of the Lord be always with you

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

440 STF – Amazing grace – how sweet the sound OR

550 STF – Forth in thy name, O Lord I go

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

Here I am, Lord God, and you are here with me.
Here we are, Holy Trinity, and you are gathered amongst us.
As you invite us into the miracle of the divine-relationship, three-in-one,
So let us notice you at work in our lives, our community, our church,
By your Spirit, we pray

Amen.¹

Hymn:

570 STF – As we gather, Father, seal us OR
30 STF – Jesus stand among us

Opening Prayers

Living, loving, Holy God,
You know us better than we can ever know ourselves.

Today, as we come to you in prayer, we know you see
All we have done
All we want to do ,
The pain and regret we carry,
The hopes we hold onto,
The things we want to say, still finding shape in our hearts.

Help us to find a way to bring all of that, and still sense your presence amongst us, holding
each and every one of us.

You welcome us with open arms, just as we are.
In your presence we can just be.

With you, there is no pretending, there are no brave faces, and no need to say, 'I'm fine'
unless we mean it.

Thank you, O God, for your
Real love;
Real acceptance.

May we be ready to hear your word and accept your challenge this day,
As we seek to share your life-changing and life-giving love with the world.

Thank you Lord.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

All Age Talk

Have you ever made a pot, or seen one being made, out of clay?

[If you have the facilities to do this, you might like to play a video of a pot being 'cast' on a potter's wheel, or if someone else has done this and would like to explain it in a few sentences, then encourage that!].

It's great fun – and quite messy! Clay is wet when you shape it, so you get brown sludge all over your hands, and everywhere else! An apron is a good idea... But it can also be incredibly frustrating, especially if you don't really know what you are doing or are having a first go. You feel you are getting it right, it is coming together, and then you make one mistake and the whole thing collapses.

Then you have to start again with a lump of collapsed clay, and try to make your pretty pot-shape again.

In one of the readings set for today, the prophet Jeremiah describes how God is like a 'potter' and the followers of God are like the clay. It is not always an easy passage from the Bible and it was clearly written at a time when the prophet was quite cross with God's people. However, it may be a helpful image for us today, and is one that has been used by Christian communities for years – this idea of the potter and his clay.

How are we allowing ourselves to be formed by God's hand? Are we trusting in the master-potter to deliver us to the best version of ourselves, or are we trying to take control all the time? Are we collapsing in a heap?

The reassuring message you might like to take away from this is that, unlike human potters and ceramics-workers, God's patience with us never runs out. No matter how many times we fall short or we fail to fulfil the image God has for us, God never, ever gives up on us. The divine goes on loving, trusting and investing in us.

Loving God, help us to live in the knowledge that you love us, no matter what. Help us to live like we are loved,

Amen. ³

Hymn:

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

564 STF – O thou who camest from above

Readings: Jeremiah 18:1-11; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Philemon 1:1-21; Luke 14:25-33

Hymn:

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566 STF – Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Reflections on the readings

Does anyone remember the old TV show *The Generation Game*? Give me a wave if so? One of the classic games was watching people try to copy a potter making a vase. It usually ended in chaos: clay flying off the wheel, misshapen jugs collapsing. Entertaining to watch, but a real mess to create!

The readings from Jeremiah and Luke aren't exactly easy or comfortable, are they? Both really challenge us, and it's Jeremiah that reminded me of the Generation Game, the prophet uses this same image of the potter.

He visits a potter and watches them at work. The pot that is being made isn't going well, so the potter reworks it into something new, shaping it as he sees fit. And then comes God's message: "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?"

In other words, God is reminding the people that they are clay in the hands of the divine. God has the power to shape, reshape, even start again. And this isn't just about Israel back then, it's about us today. Just as a potter reshapes clay, God can reshape lives, communities, and even nations, especially when things have gone badly off course.

But this reshaping comes with a warning. If people turn from evil and change their ways, God says that God will hold back from bringing disaster. But if they do wrong, even after being blessed, God may take a different course. It's a call to take responsibility, to notice the cracks in our culture and our actions, and to do better. That includes modern issues like injustice, inequality, environmental damage, and hatred in many forms. We're being asked to reform: to be reshaped for good.

Then we turn to Jesus in Luke's Gospel. He's on his way to Jerusalem and a large crowd is following him. Maybe they think something great is about to happen: a coronation, maybe? A revolution? Something drastic and the facing down of the empire? But Jesus knows what's coming: the cross.

And instead of giving a motivational speech, he says something shocking: "Anyone who comes to me but doesn't hate their own family and even their own life cannot be my disciple." That's jarring, isn't it? It makes many of us uncomfortable – why does Jesus say these difficult things sometimes?!

Perhaps Jesus isn't calling for literal hatred: he's using strong language to make a point. It's about putting God first, even above family. It's about loyalty and priorities.

Then Jesus says that anyone who doesn't carry their own cross can't be his disciple. That's tough talk. He even tells two parables about counting the cost, like someone planning a building project or a king preparing for war. These metaphors may not apply to us, and hopefully none of us have to prepare an army for war...but can we hear the message in here? The challenge about the cost of discipleship, and the change of plans that might bring for you, for me, for all of us? He's saying: don't follow me lightly. Know what you're committing to.

This is very different from today's marketing. Think about how ads follow you online, or how shopping centres now use cameras to tailor ads to your age or mood. Everything is about selling a lifestyle. Imagine if the Church advertised discipleship the same way:

"Our mission is to inspire, inform, and enable people to be Christian. We believe that being a Christian is a wonderful way to live. Being a Christian is fun! It's easy! Don't worry about the hard stuff yet."

That doesn't quite match what Jesus says, does it? Though, perhaps, sometimes we fall into this trap – marketing like the world does, instead of telling the gospel truth? Jesus is

clear that discipleship is costly. It asks for everything. But the good news is: he never asks more of us than he gave himself. He carried the cross first.

There's hope in both readings. In Jeremiah, it's the promise that if we turn back to God, God will welcome us and reshape us. In Luke, Jesus promises that those who give up much for his sake will receive more in return – both now and eternally.

Following Jesus isn't a casual lifestyle choice. It's radical. It's challenging. But it's also deeply rewarding. As Jesus said: "Whoever loses their life for me will save it."

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

707 STF – Make me a channel of your peace OR

768 STF – The peace of the Lord be always with you

Prayers of intercession

Living, loving God, we come to you in prayer again as part of our act of worship today.

As we pray, we ask that you would help us to follow in your way, so that each of us

may choose light rather than darkness,

may choose love and not hatred,

may choose hope and not despair,

that your Spirit might be at work within and through us, transforming the world around us, today and every day.

We pray for this church community, and the global church – help us to proclaim the gospel and to reveal your glory in the way we live.

Living, loving God, guide us this day,

That we might be a part of your kingdom, a piece in your puzzle, a player in your story.

As we pray as part of our act of worship today, we pray for all people who are overwhelmed by the business and busy-ness of this world, for those who lack clear direction, and who are being led astray.

Today, as we read the news, open our newspapers, turn on the radios and televisions, we pray that the leaders in our world and in the media may be people of peace, people of wisdom, people of grace, choosing paths that lead towards wholeness, light and restoration.

Help us to find ways to hold our leaders and influencers to account, that they might hear the voice of those who seek justice and peace.

Living, loving God, guide us this day,

That we might be a part of your kingdom, a piece in your puzzle, a player in your story.

Today, as we pray as part of our act of worship, we hold before you those whose lives are insecure, where relationships, homes or work are at risk; particularly recognising the impact of the housing emergency on so many people in the UK at the moment.

We ask your comforting hand on those who feel desperate, who struggle to hold on to routine, rhythm or hope, on all whose health is failing, on those who feel their powers to be

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

waning as they become more dependent on others.
Give each of us, and those around us, the courage to act with grace, clarity and humanity.
Living, loving God, guide us this day,
That we might be a part of your kingdom, a piece in your puzzle, a player in your story.
We pray these, and all our prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Generous, life-giving God,
We notice your love flowing, in, through and between us this day as we gather in this space.
Generous, life-giving God,
We offer these gifts, and the gifts of our lives, back to you and for the building of your kingdom of justice and joy,
Today and everyday,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

440 STF – Amazing grace – how sweet the sound OR
550 STF – Forth in thy name, O Lord I go

Blessing

And so we go forth, travelling in your name, O God,
Powered by your grace, O Christ,
Looking for your guidance, O Spirit.
Help me, help each of us, to follow in your way this week and in the weeks ahead,
In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker