



## ORDINARY 25C

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



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**162 STF – The prophets' voice comes down the years OR**

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

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**433 STF – Out of the depths I cry to thee, Lord God! Oh hear my prayer! OR**

**658 STF – A charge to keep I have**

Readings: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

**Hymn:**

**470 STF – Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided OR**

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

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**413 STF – Send down the fire of your justice OR**

**702 STF – I will speak out for those who have no voices**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**660 STF – Called by Christ to be disciples OR**

**668 STF – Teach me, my God and King, in all things thee to see**

Blessing

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The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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## Call to worship

Holy and blessed God,  
We have gathered on this Lord's Day,  
Gathered to worship and praise you, for you have been good to us.

In our time of singing, prayer and reflection,  
Move amongst us by your Spirit we pray, this day

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

162 STF – The prophets' voice comes down the years OR

429 STF – Lord we turn to you for mercy

## Opening Prayers

Loving God,  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
Holy Spirit,  
Today we accept your open invitation, and we come into your presence.  
Let us lay down our baggage before you, O Lord of life.

We don't even have to unpack, for all of it is known to you:  
The pain we have felt,  
The pain we have caused, intentionally or otherwise,  
The difficult conversations,  
The flashbacks,  
Our fears,  
Our regrets,  
Our deepest secrets,  
And our most precious held hopes – the ones we dare not even speak aloud.

This day, we come to you in prayer and we give you thanks, for you offer to share the load. In the peace of this moment, may we hear your words of acceptance and forgiveness, feel your comforting arms around us, and simply know you are near.

*[Pause]*

Living, loving God, you accept us as we are.

Your love for us is unconditional.

Even as we lay down our baggage, we know ourselves forgiven, loved, held and set free, just as we are.

Today, as we worship,  
Give each of us a place of safety, just to be,  
We pray.

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

Challenge each of us, gently, appropriately, to hear the invitation to keep moving forwards, trusting in your way, strengthened by your Spirit, enabled by your grace.

Lord Jesus Christ, we love you

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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

### **All Age Talk**

Let's start with a quick activity: I'm going to give you two choices each time, and you'll show me your answer by pointing left or right!

- Chocolate or crisps?
- Staying up late or going to bed early?
- Hot drinks or cold drinks
- Sharing with a friend or keeping something just for yourself?

*[Let people respond with gestures and smiles.]*

Our choices can be small or big, but they always matter!

One of our readings for today, that we will hear later in our service is a gospel reading from Luke 16, Jesus tells a tricky story about a manager who gets in trouble for wasting his master's money. The manager quickly comes up with a clever plan to reduce debts, trying to secure his future. Jesus says that even people who don't follow God can be smart about their goals, but we, as God's people, should be wise in how we live for God.

In other words, Jesus challenges us to think carefully about our choices: Do our decisions build trust? Do they show love? Do they help us live generously and honestly?

Then, in 1 Timothy 2, Paul reminds us to pray for everyone – even leaders and people in charge – so that we might live in peace and goodness. He says God wants everyone to be saved and to know the truth. Our prayers, Paul says, help make God's love real in the world.

Let's try something together:

Everyone look at your hands. These hands can make choices every day: how to act, what to give, how to help.

Now, let's open our hands like we're offering something to God. When we open our hands, we remember to give our choices, our time, and our hearts to God.

Today I invite you to seek wise, loving choices that show who we belong to. We belong to God, who is generous, fair, and loving.

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

Pray boldly and often for everyone: friends, family, neighbours, and even people who make big decisions in our world. Because when we pray, we join God in working for peace, justice, and kindness.

Jesus teaches us that our choices matter, and Paul reminds us that our prayers matter. Together, they help us build a world that looks more like God's kingdom.

Let's pray:

Loving God, thank you for giving us the chance to make choices and to pray. Help us choose what is right, fair, and loving. Teach us to pray for others and to work for peace. Thank you for being with us in every decision.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hymn:**

433 STF – Out of the depths I cry to thee, Lord God! Oh hear my prayer! OR

658 STF – A charge to keep I have

**Readings:** Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

### **Hymn:**

470 STF – Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided OR

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

### **Reflections on the readings**

In the perplexing story of Luke 16, a manager is in trouble. He owes his master money and is about to lose his job. In a rather odd manoeuvre he approaches this by telling people to reduce their bills. He does this so that they will be-friend him when he is homeless and jobless. And even more strangely, the master commends him for his shrewdness. So how are we to unpick this story?

Maybe it's good to start at the end. There are three clear instructions coming up, the first is that generosity rather than wealth will pay dividends. The second is that we need to be honest in small ways so that we can be trusted in larger matters. And the third, and most important is that we need to know what or who masters us.

Generosity rather than wealth will pay dividends.

The thought that generosity rather than wealth will pay dividends might seem somewhat sly. It may sound as if we are being told to be kind to others simply in order to gain some credit for when we are in trouble. But I am not sure this is what is being conveyed in this story. Remember it is positioned in Luke's gospel, midway between the story of the Prodigal Son and The Rich Man and Lazarus and Luke is always telling stories that reverse the hierarchies of power. So let's go back to our original story.

The protagonist is in trouble with his rich master, he worries about losing his job and his home, he is in debt because he hasn't collected debts. So, how does he counter this? By

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

telling people that they owe less, by significantly reducing their debt to the master. How is this going to help? Well, it might be possible for them to pay this and so the rich man will at least get half the money rather than nothing – and of course, by doing so he's going to make some friends along the way. Yes, that's shrewd. And if this dishonest person can be shrewd by being generous, how much more could followers of Jesus do?

We need to be honest in small ways so we can be trusted in larger matters.

We don't need to remember further back than to the actions of some of our leaders during the Covid pandemic of 2020 to see how this plays out. Good leadership isn't simply about policy decisions and political rhetoric but also about how we conduct ourselves in the matters of day to day. The church's demise is probably less due to our fudging of the doctrine of the Trinity as to how we have behaved towards our neighbours. Nobody wants to come to church to be treated unpleasantly, or to risk being unsafe or abused. Mission is much more successful if we are generous, friendly open-hearted and honest, and this goes for the rest of life too. The kingdom of God, Luke reminds us, is about reversals of power, so that those who struggle most are less indebted, surprised by generosity, set free to live differently. And, whilst we all want to campaign for years of jubilee and freedom from international debt, we also need to embody this in the everyday ways we live out the gospel both as individuals and communities. We need to do small things as if they were big things and be known for our kindness, even when it's costly.

And we need to know what (or who) masters us.

This story's punchline is that we cannot serve two masters, in particular God and money. Because whatever or whoever masters us will demand our devotion at the expense of the other. Now, clearly if we are obsessed with money, our investments, our Premium Bonds, our stocks and shares (if we have any) we are not living out the gospel as Luke describes it which turns the tables on the powerful and raises up the lowly and meek. But let's think for a moment not simply at a personal level but at a structural level.

In his book 'The Master and his Emissary' the distinguished scholar Iain McGilchrist looks in detail at our divided brain and makes a compelling argument for the left side of the brain having responsibility for analytical prowess and the ability to distil the world into analytical categories, whereas the right hemisphere favours intuition, empathy and a holistic world view. He goes on to posit that our society favours the left hand hemisphere – that is those that can analyse and control are given power. If you have the stamina, you can read his book and be more enlightened than the scope of this sermon! But if we are to ask 'who masters us' then maybe we need to look more closely at how our society is configured and who gains power – I want to suggest that the mastery of the powerful is not simply down to who shouts loudest but rather the way societies are configured to enable this to happen. And, if we are to live out the values and reversals of the kingdom, then we need not only to challenge individuals, but also the systems that enable them to be the masters.

And if this all seems overwhelming, impossible and we have started avoiding the news, then I would suggest that avoidance, apathy or hopelessness have become our master and we are not living the agonising demands of the Kingdom that Jesus describes.

Now, let's turn for a moment to Jeremiah who centuries ago we find lamenting over the captivity of his people. 'Listen, to the cry of my people from a land far away' he says 'Oh that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears'. Nobody felt as frustrated or as powerless as Jeremiah, he was in an agony of despair because he loved his people too much, grieved so much both for their faithlessness and their captivity. And that is the reversal we re-discover in Jesus, the agony of faithlessness and the longing for freedom. This is our calling, uncomfortable, disorientating and upsetting though it is. We need to watch the news and continue to lament otherwise our master becomes despair.

So, costly generosity, honesty in all matters large and small and knowing who masters us. And, as the letter of Timothy reminds us, prayer for all who lead us so that the principalities and powers of the world can be transformed by God's enduring and abiding love. This is both our hope and our salvation.

Amen

Discussion questions:

- How can our church be more generous?
- How can we be more honest in small matters so we are trusted in large affairs?
- What or who masters us – individually and systemically? <sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

413 STF – Send down the fire of your justice OR

702 STF – I will speak out for those who have no voices

### **Prayers of intercession**

Generous God, whose kingdom reverses the systems of power,  
Help us to notice who or what has mastery over us,  
Help us to resist insecurities that lead to meanness,  
Help us to protest where injustice is systemic.

Challenging God, whose kingdom demands that we notice,  
Open our eyes, fill them with wells of tears,  
Open our hearts, fill them with generosity and anger,  
Open our minds, fill them with new ways of seeing.

Energising God, whose spirit demands compassion,  
Move us to change and simplicity,  
Move us to call out for mercy,  
Move us from apathy to action.

For the ways of your kingdom are justice, generosity and love,  
And we desire to be your friend in that place,

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

Heavenly parent,  
This day we give you thanks – thanks for all we have received from you,  
Show us how to be grateful,  
And how to turn your gifts into blessings for others, including these gifts given here today,  
we pray  
Amen.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Barbara Glasson. If you are interested in reading further, Barbara recommends Iain McGilchrist: The Master and His Emissary – The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World. Yale University Press 2012

<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Barbara Glasson

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

**Hymn:**

660 STF – Called by Christ to be disciples OR

668 STF – Teach me, my God and King, in all things thee to see

**Blessing**

Lord you have called us, and we are seeking to follow you.

Lord you have blessed us, and we are learning to bless others.

Lord you have loved us, show us how to be people of love this week,

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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