

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 32A

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

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Ordinary 32 - Year A
12th November 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

173 STF – In the darkness of this world OR

188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

238 STF – Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us OR

177 STF – Lo, he comes with clouds descending

Readings: Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

405 STF – Great is the darkness that covers the earth OR

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

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

345 STF – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood

Blessing

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Call to worship

Gracious God, on this Remembrance Sunday, your love has called us here, and here we come, gathering in your name, to remember, to pray, to worship and to seek peace.

As we worship, Lord, transform and renew us. Awaken our spirits, show and inspire us to respond to your love by spreading love, peace and justice into the world, in Jesus' name.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

173 STF – In the darkness of this world OR

188 STF – There's a light upon the mountains

Opening Prayers

Be Still. Pause.

This is a time for you to connect to the Divine.

Abba. Spirit. Jesus. Holy One. God.

Their presence is around us.

In the stillness, notice them.

In the stillness, welcome them.

In the stillness, be open to them.

In this space, we worship them.

And today, you have been forgiven and set free by their unbounding grace.

This is why we worship, let us worship and pray together this day,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Today's topic is about passing on stories across generations. What stories can you share around the church?

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Annan-Hood

Activity one: Sharing whispers

- Ask a volunteer to whisper a message to someone else in the room – it could be something exciting about their week, one of their favourite memories, or a piece of advice they were told by someone from a different generation.
- The second person whispers the message to a third, and so on – make it easy and say the person next to them, or make it harder and get them to move across the room.
- Once it's gone all the way around the room, ask the last person to say the message out loud. Has the message changed? Why do you think this is?
- If the message is compelling, you could ask the original person if they would like to share the full story with the group.

Activity two: Passing on stories

- Ask everyone to put either a question or a message anonymously into a container.
- Questions should be 'something you'd like to ask someone of another generation'. Messages should be 'something you'd like to share with another generation about your generation'.
- Remember, different generations include multiple generations of adults, and of young people, not just kids and adults.
- If people are struggling, give some guidance, e.g. 'share something you don't think another generation knows about your generation's attitude to technology, politics or money'. Or 'ask questions about something a different generation has experienced'.

Amen.³

Hymn:

238 STF – Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us OR

177 STF – Lo, he comes with clouds descending

Readings: Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart

Reflections on the readings

Each bullet point is a question you could ask the group. You may wish to ask for silent reflections, for people to call out their answers, to write things down (or create a shared picture together) or for them to turn to their neighbour. A combination of all of these

³ All Age Talk written by Abi Jarvis

demonstrates good inclusive practice. You are also encouraged to share your own stories of God's faithfulness to you, or quotes from books you have read that will be encouraging.

- What stories do you treasure about your family history, or wider community? Good and bad. Or what wisdom has been passed on to you?

Today's readings talk of the past and the future.

The future

The passages from Matthew and Thessalonians both talk, in different ways, about Jesus' return. Matthew records Jesus' advice to 'keep watch' because no one knows when it will happen. In Thessalonians, Paul speaks of resurrection, archangels, and superhero-style flights into the clouds. These topics are ones that are often exciting to youth groups, raised on post-apocalyptic films, books and video games, but adults tend to avoid them (unless they're holding a megaphone on a street corner: "repent, Jesus is coming!")

Why is this; are we scared of death? Perhaps we're afraid that our life hasn't been "good enough". God's faithfulness to us isn't based on how good we are, only on our commitment to God, and God's love for us.

The past

Although it can be tempting to always look forward to what will happen next, we can also learn much from the past. In the Old Testament, God's people looked to the past continually. One of the key themes seen repeatedly is this: Look at how God has been faithful before. And know that God is faithful now, and will be faithful again. In both Psalm 78 and Joshua 24, we read the history of how the Israelites put their trust in God, and how God brought them from slavery, through exile, to the promised land.

In Joshua 24, Joshua is coming to the end of his life, having finally brought God's people to the 'promised land'. This life would seem settled and bountiful compared to the decades of exile and, before that, slavery in Egypt. It may seem less important to keep focused on God now, or even tempting to turn to the foreign gods of this new land (think about how people suffering under religious persecution today can seem so much more passionate about their faith than those of us who live in relative comfort and security). So Joshua gathers God's people and baits them – will they turn to these new gods, or continue to follow the God who has been faithful to them and their ancestors for generations?

- We all struggle to trust God sometimes. What are the things that make trust hard?

The repercussions for turning away from God sound harsh to our ears. But it is worth noting that despite Joshua's words, God *does* forgive the Israelites, over and over and over again. It may remind us of a parent who says 'if you don't finish your dinner you won't get any dessert' but of course, you do. Though the Old Testament gives story after story of how God's people turned away and followed other gods, God's love remained steadfast. No matter how bad things got, God was always with God's people.

By telling these stories, the lesson of God's faithfulness was passed from generation to generation. Such oral history is a tradition that we have perhaps lost a little, relying instead on photos, history textbooks and dramatic Hollywood re-enactments. But anyone who has listened to a documentary featuring personal human stories, or listened to eyewitness stories in a museum exhibit, knows how different it is when you hear the stories from those who were personally affected. I spent a memorable two hours with my grandma, looking at photos of her uncles and postcards they sent while serving during World War 2, hearing her memories of them and the stories they had told her. In the Old Testament, each generation learns to trust God partially because their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and neighbours have told them their stories.

- ‘Telling people about God’ is one of the commitments of [A Methodist Way of Life](#), a way of thinking about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. What story or wisdom would you like to pass on about God’s faithfulness to the next generation? Share it now.

Our actions also matter, just as much as our words. Another commitment of A Methodist Way of Life is ‘We live in a way that draws people to Jesus’. If we live as if we trust God, that behaviour will be seen by other generations as well. It’s the indescribable quality that makes someone go ‘I want what you’ve got’. It’s not always easy! But it can be one of the most important ways we can make a difference in the lives of people around us.

- What qualities have you admired in the people who have gone before you – perhaps even people in your church today.
- What stories would you like your children and grandchildren to tell about you?

And so, by the stories we tell and the way we live our lives, we pass on our own faithfulness to others. We can help the next generation to know that no matter how hard things might get, even when you’re not sure if God is listening to you, God is always faithful. God is always present.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

405 STF – Great is the darkness that covers the earth OR

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past

Prayers of intercession

[Please add a said or sung response to adapt to local situation. You might like to play, read, and/or sing a verse and chorus of STF 693 – Beauty for Brokenness]

Let us pray for all those on an unknown journey,
For those ill and in strange places, fearful of an unknown future,

[Pause – with reflective song/space/response]

For those affected by the cost of living crisis, fearful of the next bill

[Pause – with reflective song/space/response]

For those with a sense of calling to ministry, unsure of what the future holds

[Pause – with reflective song/space/response]

For politicians and those in power, who know that their decisions shape the future of many

[Pause – with reflective song/space/response]

For the church and its mission in turbulent and changing times

[Pause – with reflective song/space/response]

For all those grieving, facing a future without a loved one

[Pause – with reflective song/space/response]

⁴ Reflection written by Abi Jarvis

For ourselves and the fears within that sometimes we cannot speak even to ourselves,
stopping us taking steps on an unknown journey

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

We are your people Lord, accept again the offerings we make.

We are your disciples Lord, use us to build your Kingdom.

Bless these gifts, and may they become tools for your grace.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

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

345 STF – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood

Blessing

We go out, with an open-hearted God at our side,

We leave here, with a loving God in our midst,

We face the week ahead, with the Spirit of God amongst us.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker