

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 34A

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

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Ordinary 34 - Year A
26th November 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

317 STF – At the name of Jesus OR

335 STF – Rejoice, the Lord is King!

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

264 STF – Make way, make way, for Christ the King OR

183 STF – Praise to the God who clears the way

Readings: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

Hymn:

367 STF – When I was lost, you came and rescued me OR

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

347 STF – Crown him with many crowns OR

185 STF – Sing we the King who is coming to reign

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

358 STF – Let earth and heaven agree OR

714 STF – The God who sings a new world into being

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

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Call to worship

You are our King, Lord Jesus,
and this Christ-the-King Sunday, we come to worship you.
As we prepare to go into Advent, and to celebrate your incarnation,
We thank you and praise you, Lord Jesus,
Come amongst us by your Spirit, we pray

Amen.¹

Hymn:

317 STF – At the name of Jesus OR
335 STF – Rejoice, the Lord is King!

Opening Prayers

Let us prepare ourselves,
For the encounter,
For worship,
For the Spirit to come amongst us.

In our preparations, we are sorry.
Lord, I have fallen short, I am sorry.

In our preparations, we encounter grace.
Lord, I know I am forgiven, loved and set free.

In our preparations, we give thanks for all we have received.
Lord, today I am thank for so much.

In our preparations, we praise and adore you, for you are the God of all things.
Lord, I praise you, for you are an awesome God.

In our preparations, we still our hearts and listen for your word to us.
Be still with me a while?

[Pause]

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hands up all those who have had to wait for a delivery from a well-known online retailer. Or had to wait around for a utility company to arrive and sort something out in the house.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

[Out of the people with the hands up, ask them how long they had to wait. If anyone says they had to had to wait a few days because of delays, say “That’s important, so we’ll keep that in mind and come back to that in a bit!”]

Waiting is always the worst part it seems. You start to build up the anticipation when you see the alert “Your package is out for delivery!” and want to make sure you're around, reloading the notice with an up-to-date location of the package. Then! “Your package is 8 stops away!” Oh, the excitement! You see the small van edging closer and closer to you, and you might sit by the window to just glimpse the van arrive a few seconds earlier than planned!

Or...the van stays at 8 stops away. It doesn't move. The updates go quiet. Then it says the delivery has been delayed. So you go back to waiting.

Those of you that had delayed deliveries. How long did you have to wait?

[Get answers from those who spoke before]

We all eventually got what we were waiting for, usually! But sometimes there is a delay. And we just must be mindful of that.

That is what the Advent season, which we are about to enter, is all about. We wait for Christmas, we wait for Jesus, we wait for the miracle of God with us.

Waiting for Jesus can sometimes feel like we're constantly waiting for a package that's always delayed. But the waiting builds the anticipation! And we're told to keep an eye on the notifications for when Jesus comes, if not; we'll miss out and be forced to look for where the Jesus package went.

Prayer

Loving God, fill us with excitement and anticipation for your coming kin-dom, and strengthen us with a patient resolve for when that day arrives.

Amen.³

Hymn:

264 STF – Make way, make way, for Christ the King OR

183 STF – Praise to the God who clears the way

Readings: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

Hymn:

367 STF – When I was lost, you came and rescued me OR

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice

Reflections on the readings

Today's reflection is provided by our charity partners at All We Can – the Methodist Church's official international development agency, working around the world to help tackle poverty and see

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

every person's potential fulfilled. You can find out more about their work and how your support can make a dramatic difference at allwecan.org.uk or on social media at [@allwecanuk](https://twitter.com/allwecanuk)

All We Can's work involves seeking justice for people living in poverty, in some of the world's poorest communities. At the end of our Old Testament reading today, in that beautiful description of God as shepherd, Ezekiel uses the phrase: I will shepherd the flock with justice.

I wonder, what does that word justice mean to you?

Please, shout out and share with me any thoughts, words or phrases that come into your mind when I say the word 'justice'.

[Take several suggestions, you might like to write them up on a flipchart so you can keep referring to them later in the service].

Perhaps some of us think of the legal system (sometimes referred to as the justice system), some of us may think of equality and fairness, or of a particular charity or organization we are involved with. On a hot day (not a late-November Sunday!) it is possible to start the word so long that all you can see is 'just ice' and wish someone would add some to your drink!

Justice is an important Jesus word too. Is the gospel even 'good news' if it doesn't bring justice? Right at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus goes into the synagogue and reads from Isaiah a manifesto of justice: good news to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, acceptance for the socially marginalized.

But, despite Jesus' proclamations, 2,000 years of Christian ministry, and countless other religious and secular groups, organisations and individuals who have worked for justice...despite all that, we know that a lot that is wrong with God's world, things are not 'as God would have them be.' There are a lot of people who don't have everything they need to survive, and many more who cannot thrive. The academic Amarta Sen talks about true poverty as 'poverty of opportunities'. Often that is about money, but really it is about a limitation on what it is possible for your life to be. That poverty continues to exist in many societies and places in the world. There are lots of people who don't get to be all that they could be.

Why is that, I wonder?

And what can we do about it?

The Jesus story is an invitation into wrestling with those questions and, most importantly into doing something about them. The famous verse from Micah 6:8 says that 'what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.' Perhaps the most important word in the whole verse is that little one, 'do'. Not 'think about justice' or 'talk about justice at church' or 'have meetings about justice', but *do* justice.

That is what our Gospel reading for today, from Matthew 25, is all about. The sheep and the goats is an invitation into doing something about injustice.

We are in the season of Christingle services, and this year, All We Can's Christingle resource is an invitation to think about justice, and our role in healing the injustices in the world. The premise of the resources (available from the All We Can website) is the simple idea of an empty cocktail stick: that whilst there is abundance and the harvest is plentiful, there is inequality too, and while lots of us have too much, some people have little or nothing.

As we sit with the discomfort of that, we hear the words of Jesus: For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

What is our instinctive reaction?

I think, for many of us, it can be to rush in and do something, anything, to try to make this situation better, right?

All We Can takes its name from the famous quote attributed to John Wesley, the invitation to 'do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, at all the times you can, in all the places you can, as long as ever you can.' This may seem like an invitation into action and – in part – it is. There is no doubt that we are called to respond to the injustice in the world, to use the privilege and blessings we have, to put our resources to work to seek justice.

But, there is also a clarification to all that: the can. Do all the good **you can**. The team and partners at All We Can recognise this as an invitation into discernment, into thinking through what it is that is yours to do (for more on this, look out for All We Can' Lent resources, available to pre-order soon, which will be an exploration in discernment and vocations). What is the good that you can do? What is the good you are called to do? And what might you need to stop doing, to make space for that?

The experience of 80+ years of supporting communities experiencing poverty around the world has taught All We Can one vital lesson, that the team are keen to share with the world: we have to put communities in the driving seat of their own lives and the change in their communities. The 'rushing in' that comes so instinctively when we see injustice at play, usually doesn't work and often has negative impacts. There are so many 'white elephant projects' across the developing world, where well meaning people have raised money for a well and put it in the wrong place, or a hospital with no staff, or a whitewashed wall painted by tourists in a village where people are dying of a curable disease. Rushing in isn't always best, and being the hero almost never is.

It's time for this to stop. As All We Can's partner in Malawi, Victor, would say, 'the local people have a Phd in their local community' and its time for us to honour that, to stand with them, to enable them to take the lead in changing their mindset. That's the work Victor has committed his life to, and has seen dramatic changes in Chikwawa region of Malawi, by enabling people to change their mindset and be in the driving seat of their own change. Of course they need resources and support, of course it is our job to respond to the injustice in the world, or find ourselves listed amongst the goats. But it is also our job to pay attention to the way Jesus goes about tackling injustice during his lifetime – always together, always alongside, always relational.

Can we do the same?⁴

Hymn:

347 STF – Crown him with many crowns OR

185 STF – Sing we the King who is coming to reign

⁴ Reflection written by All We Can

Prayers of intercession

God of justice,
Keep us from just singing – move us into action.

Today we pray for All We Can's work around the world, recognising the difficulty of stepping back from wanting to be the hero.

We pray for their partners, including Victor in Malawi, praying for wisdom and grace to continue to lead and support the communities they serve in seeing every person's potential fulfilled.

God of justice,
Keep us from just singing – move us into action.

Lord, may we respond by faith to what we hear, and use our mouths to share who you are.

May we tell of your good deeds and love, and inspire faith in those around us.

Help us to have compassion for those in need, and respond in love with acts of generosity.

God of justice,
Keep us from just singing – move us into action.

Give strength to the struggling and hope to the hopeless.

To the creative God who dreamt up our world
Grant vision and insight to those with a heart to change things for the better.

To the compassionate God
Heal what is hurting and restore what has been broken.

With grateful hearts we thank our loving God,
whose compassion never ceases,
whose love for us never runs dry,
whose fight against injustice never relents.

God of justice,
Keep us from just singing – move us into action.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

We have received so much, and now we return something of that to you, O God.
In this moment, on this day, we commit ourselves to you – use us, use this community of gathered people, these individuals, use me – for your glory and a better world.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by All We Can

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Hymn:

358 STF – Let earth and heaven agree OR

714 STF – The God who sings a new world into being

Blessing

We go from this place, inspired by your message of inclusivity Lord God.

We go to welcome all people, to make space for all things,

We go to do all that we can, in the name of love.

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker