

twelvebaskets



LENT 5A

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

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Lent 5 - Year A
26th March 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

565 STF – Only by grace can we enter OR

163 STF – When listening prophets dare to speak

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk [Balloon – not yet blown up – required]

Hymn:

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

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free, walk, walk in the light

Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Hymn:

582 STF – Eat this bread and never hunger OR

252 STF – Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread, the Bread of Life'

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

587 STF – I am the bread, the bread of life OR

733 STF – God, enfold us, through desolate loss

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

345 STF – And can it be OR

303 STF – I know that my Redeemer lives

Blessing

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Call to worship

Here, in this moment, on this morning, we have turned aside.

Here, we continue an ancient Jewish tradition of preserving a day for rest, a day for holiness, for an escape from production and busy-ness.

Here, we take a moment to breathe in, and to encounter the living, resurrected God.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

565 STF – Only by grace can we enter OR

163 STF – When listening prophets dare to speak

Opening Prayers

God of each moment,
God of every time and space,
God who is gentle, yet mighty
Lowly, yet almighty
Refugee, yet King,
We worship you this day.

In your power, strengthen us.
In your gentleness, guide us.
In your lowliness take away our selfish pride.
In your grace, forgive us.
In your majesty enable us to lift ourselves up so that others might see you in your full glory.

[Pause]

God of each country,
God of each and every one of us,
As a shepherd, watch over us,
As the King call us to be your royal priesthood.

God who is our shepherd and King,
Christ who was put to death and rose on the third day
Spirit who comforts and empowers,
God that is three in one, be present in this worship service, and forever in our lives.

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

[Show the congregation a balloon – not yet blown up].

What is this?

Is it much fun at the moment?

Can we have fun with it – what do we need to do?

Yes! We need to blow it up! Let's do that then...*[either blow up the balloon yourself or identify a willing volunteer with strong lungs!]*

Now, you might all need to bunch together *[take time to move people if they are in different parts of the church building]*, but I'm going to hit the balloon up into the air, and then we will see how long we can keep it from touching the floor!

[If this proves really hard, you may want to have a few goes!]

Well, that was fun wasn't it...

That balloon was pretty useless and uninteresting before, wasn't it, and then we blew breath into it, and it came alive!

In today's readings from the Bible, we will hear a little bit more about breath and the way it brings people to life and resurrection! Breath is very important for us isn't it? It is both really natural (we don't usually even notice we are doing it!) and really really important...

God breathes life into the human race at the beginning of Genesis. Perhaps today, as we breathe, we can notice the presence of God, alongside us, close by, in our very breath.

One of the ways we use breathing is to sing God's praise, so let's sing...³

Hymn:

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

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free, walk, walk in the light

Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Hymn:

582 STF – Eat this bread and never hunger OR

252 STF – Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread, the Bread of Life'

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Reflections on the readings

Today's reflection comes to us from Elaine Lindridge, the District Mission Enabler for the Newcastle District. She writes...

In my daughter's class there were five boys called Jack....it was a very common name that year. Five different little boys – they looked different, lived in different places, had different characteristics, and grew up to live very different lives.

When we hear about Mary in the New Testament, some people mix up the lives of several very different women. Mary was a very common name among Palestinian Jews – so much so that around one in four women were called Mary. So it's only to be expected that a lot of the women Jesus met were actually called Mary.

However, just like all the little boys called Jack in my daughter's class, all these Mary's are not the same person. Yet for years, people have been confused and they've mixed up which Mary is which. To be fair, sometimes the New Testament is confusing and it's not always totally clear which Mary the writers of the gospels are referring to, so it's particularly helpful when the writers give us some clues, such as 'Mary the mother of Jesus'. Or in the case of today's reading from John, 'Mary of Bethany'.

This Mary in particular is not to be confused with Mary Magdalene, literally Mary from Magdala. Mary of Magdala and Mary of Bethany are two completely different women, and also to be clear, there is no evidence that either Mary was a prostitute!

There are three stories in the Bible where we can be sure that the Mary we are hearing about is this Mary, Mary of Bethany.

First when Jesus came to her home and Martha wasn't happy that Mary was sitting listening to Jesus. Second, the story today about the death of her brother Lazarus.

Thirdly, when Mary poured an expensive jar of perfume all over Jesus' feet.

I couldn't help but notice that the feet of Jesus plays a part in all three of these encounters with Mary.

1. She sat at his feet to learn
2. She fell at his feet in her need
3. She anointed his feet showing her devotion.

Let's look at these three encounters in a little more depth and see what they say to us today about our encounters with Jesus.

First - She sat at his feet to learn.

There's been lots of sermons written about Mary and Martha, often asking the unhelpful question about which sister you are most like. I think that misses the point of this encounter. In the story, Mary assumed the posture of a disciple when she sat at the feet of Jesus to learn from him. And she was commended for it by Jesus when Jesus came to her defence and said, 'Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.' Luke 10:42. So what does Mary the disciple say to us today? Where do we need to prioritise time and space to metaphorically sit at the feet of Jesus? And perhaps more importantly, are we encountering Jesus in a way that demonstrates we are one of his disciples?

Second - She fell at his feet in her need.

In the passage we've heard read today, at verse 32 we hear:

*'When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'*³³ *When Jesus saw*

her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.'³⁵ Jesus began to weep.

At this encounter when Mary fell at his feet it shows that she depended on Jesus. Her cry of *'Lord, if you had been here'* shows that she knew things would have been different if Jesus had been present, it shows that her confidence was in Jesus.

Grief – especially the kind of grief that comes when we lose a loved one – can literally bring us to our knees. Many of us here today will have experienced that kind of grief. We can take heart from Mary of Bethany as she doesn't fall to bits... rather, she falls towards Jesus. And here's the comfort for us all, Jesus wept. Jesus shared in her pain. His comfort does not come from a place of detachment but from a place of understanding and I think for me this is one of the most glorious things about Jesus. So for those of us experiencing grief, let's remember that the feet of Jesus is a place of comfort and understanding.

Thirdly - She anointed his feet showing her devotion.

Shortly before the crucifixion, we have the story of Mary kneeling again at the feet of Jesus, but this time in a way that shows her deep devotion and love for him (John 12:1-8). Using expensive nard (perfume) she anoints his feet then wipes them with her hair. Only in John's gospel is the woman named as Mary of Bethany. Her love for Jesus was so deep and life changing that it led to this bold, extravagant almost extreme, expression of worship. I say extreme because her gift was questioned. Remember how Judas in said *'Why was this perfume not sold and the money given to the poor?'* In our times when we see many using foodbanks, unable to heat homes and genuinely struggling with rises in the cost of living, Judas' question is one we might be tempted to ask too. Mary obviously loved Jesus, but did she really have to be so wasteful?

Yet again, Jesus defends her saying, *'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'*

Mary of Bethany's story challenges us in many ways. We often hear of Fathers of faith but here we see a Mother of our faith – and what a great legacy she leaves. When we look at Scripture with fresh, unbiased eyes and open ourselves to learning from her example, we see something beautiful and challenging. Here is a woman who had a deep connectedness with Jesus and lived a life of study, devotion, and reliance on Jesus.

I read an interesting quote by a blog writer called Susan Nelson. She says,

'Mary of Bethany is the Rosa Parks of her day as she refuses to be seated in the back, instead taking a seat up front at Jesus' feet. Jesus promised that the place of discipleship would not be taken away from Mary.'

So to finish, I ask:

- How can we demonstrate a love and devotion for Jesus that is extravagant and bold? Or do we hold back and guard ourselves?
- What do we learn from Mary that we can emulate in our lives?⁴

⁴ Reflection written by Elaine Lindridge

Hymn:

587 STF – I am the bread, the bread of life OR

733 STF – God, enfold us, through desolate loss

Prayers of intercession

During these prayers there will be several pauses when you are encouraged to wait, to breathe deeply, to listen and to bring your own thoughts before God.

Loving God,
we pause before you in prayer and devotion
and acknowledge that in this moment and place
you are here with us.

[Pause & breathe deeply]

Please help us to learn from Mary so that we too may fall at the feet of Jesus,
In order to learn
In our need
In worship and devotion.

[Pause & breathe deeply]

We pray for others that they too we rest at the feet of Jesus.
We pray for those involved in teaching, learning and sharing of knowledge.
We pray for schools, students and all involved in education.

[Pause & breathe deeply]

We pray for those in deep need – those known to us personally and those we have only heard about.

[Pause & breathe deeply]

We pray for those who do not know that the feet of Jesus is a safe place to be.
In the silence as we name them before you,
we ask that they too would become aware of your all consuming love and acceptance.

[Pause & breathe deeply]

This we pray in the name of Jesus

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

We come to you, your Lenten people, accept our gifts we pray.
Help us to move beyond 'bread alone' and to see that all we have comes from you,
O God.

Show us how to be a generous people, giving our love and our talents, not hiding them in private.

Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Elaine Lindridge

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Hymn:

345 STF – And can it be OR

303 STF – I know that my Redeemer lives

Blessing

God of the wilderness places, journey with us we pray.

As we go from this place, inspire and uplift each one of us, to seek your kingdom come, your will be done, in this place and throughout your world.

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker