

# twelvebaskets



## EASTER 6A

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

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **theworshipcloud.com**

**Sixth Sunday of Easter - Year A**  
14th May 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**628 STF – Faithful One, so unchanging OR**

**463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**94 STF – To God be the glory, great things he has done! OR**

**372 STF – Come down, O Love divine**

Readings: Acts 17:22-31; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

**Hymn:**

**418 STF – We have a gospel to proclaim OR**

**476 STF – One more step along the world I go**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**16 STF – We give immortal praise OR**

**296 STF – Christ has risen while earth slumbers**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

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

**350 STF – I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship**

Blessing

---

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on [www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).

Copyright for content is retained by the original author / contributor.

**[www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com)**

## **Call to worship**

Here we are, God of all grace,  
Gathered in your name to worship.  
Come amongst us, by your Spirit we pray,

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

628 STF – Faithful One, so unchanging OR  
463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past

## **Opening Prayers**

Loving God,  
We give thanks for the life you breathed into us,  
the world you created with care and love,  
the gifts you've bestowed on each one of us,  
and the solid foundations you have laid for us to build our lives upon.

Our mouths are full of your praise as we join together in worship.

Merciful Father,  
We confess that we get distracted and forget to rely on you when we face difficulties.

We confess that we sometimes forget to look for you in the strangers we meet,  
we forget to use words to build up and spread love,  
we sometimes struggle to reflect you when we are burdened by worries and fears.

Thank you that you do not keep a record of our wrongs and that we can start each  
new day in the full assurance of your forgiveness and never-ending love.

Lord, our refuge and our strength,  
fill us afresh with your spirit,  
replenish our low reserves,  
energise us to seek you,  
to listen to you,  
to love you,  
and to love one another as you desire.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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

---

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

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

## All Age Talk

Has anyone here been a part of a Fantasy Football League? Or played a team sport at school?

We've all had to pick a team, and we all have different reasons why we pick certain people. Maybe they are taller, faster, smaller, more agile, can throw really far, is intelligent, really funny, or even because you are great friends with them.

What about the Marvel Avengers? Who would be on your team?

Invite one or two people to tell you about a team they have picked – whether in an online game, in PE, or similar. What were they looking for in the people they picked?

Now, whether its sports or the Avengers, everyone has to do some preparation to be on a team. They train, wear the right clothes, have a good meal, obey rules, or in the case of the Hulk: Get Angry!

We're also in a season of getting prepared and being picked for teams. In the weeks after Easter, it's a lead up to Ascension Sunday and Pentecost (more on that next week!). Jesus spent that time meeting people, instructing his disciples, and making sure they were ready to share the love of God with everyone. But Jesus doesn't want us to do this all alone now, and he didn't then! In fact, Jesus chose a great team member: The Holy Spirit! But what is the Holy Spirit?

Read John 14: 15-17.

What an amazing pick by Jesus! A friend who will always be with us, who can help us, who sees us and knows us and loves us. Jesus will mention the Holy Spirit more over the next few weeks, and they make an awesome entrance into the disciples lives, and indeed our lives! But for now, know this:

Jesus picked us for his team. He sent the Holy Spirit to support us. Why? Because Jesus sees in each and everyone of us the things that make us special. The gifts that make us a valued member of any team.

A prayer:

Loving God, thank you for picking us for your team. Help us to see the gifts that you see in us, to understand them, and to prepare us to use them for the work you have for us.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### Hymn:

94 STF – To God be the glory, great things he has done! OR

372 STF – Come down, O Love divine

**Readings:** Acts 17:22-31; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

---

<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

**Hymn:**

418 STF – We have a gospel to proclaim OR

476 STF – One more step along the world I go

**Reflections on the readings**

Today's three readings from the New Testament present us with the words and actions attributed to three gigantic figures of Christian history – Jesus himself in John's gospel; the disciple Peter writing to the early church and the apostle Paul, formerly a persecutor of Christians, now turned missionary, preaching in Athens. It's intriguing to imagine these three around a dinner table and to wonder about their different perspectives on the Christian life and what is important. I sense it might be quite a challenging conversation!

From the many treasures we might find in these three passages, let's examine particularly the way in which they approach the calling of the Christian to bear witness, and how we might do so. We'll begin and end our reflection with the words of Jesus and in between see how Peter and Paul respond.

These verses in John 14 are a small part of the very lengthy discourse given by Jesus which John records taking place on the eve of Jesus' death, at the Last Supper. Here Jesus is both reassuring and challenging his disciples – if they want to prove their love for Jesus they must keep his commandments. Already during this same meal Jesus has demonstrated the nature of a servant by washing their feet and has charged them to do the same; he has then given them a 'new commandment' (13:34) to love one another in such a way that by their love, 'everyone will know that you are my disciples' (13:35). We may picture ourselves at this same meal and hear Jesus speaking the same words to us – we too are called, commanded even, to love one another in such a way that everyone will see that we follow Jesus. Everyone... our family and friends, our neighbours and colleagues, the folk in the bus queue or at the other end of a cold call... It's a weighty responsibility – for the disciples two thousand years ago, and for us today; can we really live like that?

So it's important that we read on and see that the disciples will be empowered by 'another Advocate', the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promises will be sent by God after Jesus has left them. In this final week of the Easter season, before the celebration of Pentecost next Sunday, we too are reassured by these words of Jesus; we too can receive once again the power of the Spirit who will live within us and through whom we will know that we are closely bound up with God, with Christ, in love, for ever.

Peter was present at that final meal, Peter heard the words of Jesus, but that didn't make him perfect overnight. We know that within the next 24 hours Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus – what shame and grief that must have caused him in the coming days until on Easter Sunday morning, he met with the Risen Christ on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and was given the opportunity, three times, to declare his love for Jesus. Peter knew as well as any of us here can possibly know, that it can be very difficult to bear witness to Jesus, to live that life of love which will demonstrate where our allegiance lies. Perhaps that is why, in this letter which bears Peter's name, we hear a call to be eager to do what is good. Even if that has difficult consequences, we are not to fear, we are not to be intimidated. Then come the words we are focussing on today, (from vv15-16); 'Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.' Peter knew failure in this, and so he urges the early

church not to fail where he failed, but to be ready at any time to explain to anyone that the hope in which they live comes from Christ.

Peter is speaking to a church which was experiencing organised persecution in a way that few if any of us have known, although we should not forget that as we sit here worshipping God in freedom, our siblings in other parts of the world may well have had to face violence and abuse as Christians this very day. But just because we are not a persecuted church it doesn't mean that it is easy to bear witness to our faith in the society in which we live. Sometimes apathy and indifference can be worse enemies than opposition – it can seem today that no-one intimidates or maligns us because no-one cares... unless, that is, they think we are about to try to convert them. So, most of the time, we don't. It is worth noting that Peter is not advocating the kind of strident witnessing which has sometimes given the church a bad name; 'yet do it with gentleness and reverence' he says – Peter, renowned for his outspokenness, has learned a 'more excellent way', it seems.

And if we return, briefly, to the gospel passage; right at the start Jesus makes it clear that the life of discipleship is not about the words we use, 'If you love me', Jesus says, 'you will keep my commandments'. Our actions, our motivations, our energy, our relationships are all to be rooted in the way of love and the path of service. We are first and foremost to live out the name Christian in lives of love – words will follow.

So finally let's turn to Paul and see whether his actions bear out what we are hearing from Jesus and Peter. The Acts of the Apostles is an energetic, almost breath-taking, account of the early days of the Christian church, with its two leading characters, Peter and Paul, travelling, preaching, converting, healing and, frequently, being arrested, attacked or threatened. It's a roller-coaster of a book as the church learned on the job about what it means to be the body of Christ.

By the time we reach chapter 17, Paul is the focus and Luke (one of his companions and the writer of the book) relates several of Paul's missionary journeys. It is the second such journey which takes Paul to Athens, modern day capital of Greece and, in Paul's time, very much the centre of philosophy and religion. Highly populated, it was also spiritually crowded, with a contemporary saying that "in Athens, there are more gods than men." This is the situation Paul discovers as he wanders the streets of the city, and this is what he first speaks about as he seeks to engage an audience. The 'Areopagus' refers both to the governing council of Athens and to the hill where they met (Mars Hill) and Paul finds his way to both. His sermon is interesting – for one thing it doesn't mention Jesus by name at all. Rather it begins with what we might almost see as flattery, he notes how religious the Athenians are and picks out from among the many shrines he has seen one dedicated to 'an unknown God'. This he chooses to interpret to them as the God he knows, loves and serves, the 'God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth', going on to speak of God's eternal interaction with the human race, and of forthcoming judgment by 'a man whom he has appointed', who, through being raised from death, is clearly demonstrated to be God's instrument.

In Greek the word for resurrection is also a name, 'Anastasia' and it appears from the following verses that there was some confusion amongst the listeners as to whether Paul was trying to introduce a new female deity by that name but they are sufficiently intrigued to want to hear more and some, at least, do become believers there and then, including, it seems, a member of the council, Dionysius, along with Damaris and others. Perhaps it doesn't seem like a very promising or powerful start – but let's notice that Paul has done what Peter commends, he has given an account of the hope

within himself and done so with gentleness and reverence for the beliefs already held by those to whom he is speaking.

We can learn much from Paul's example. He took time to look around, to be interested in the culture, not to dismiss it as ungodly or pagan. The way in which we engage with those around us who have different value systems or core beliefs from ours is also significant. Can we do so without appearing to judge or condemn? Can we find, within the lifestyles of those closest to us, that 'unknown god' which attracts their allegiance and even their worship? Starting there, can we, gently and with reverence, demonstrate by our lives how, for us, that sense of longing and the need for fulfilment is identified with our trust in and love of God? To live in this way might just free us from the guilt we feel about the paucity of our witness because it's not all about us, it's all about God, it's all about love.

'On that day', Jesus says, 'you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.' Hallelujah, thanks be to God.

Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

16 STF – We give immortal praise OR

296 STF – Christ has risen while earth slumbers

### **Prayers of intercession**

Gracious God, source of all love, fill our hearts with your love now as we pray for the world you have made:

We pray today for all who doubt that they are loved;  
for all who are broken-hearted at the ending of a relationship,  
for all who are grieving the death of a partner, lover, family member, friend,  
for all whose upbringing was starved of love  
God of love, pour out your love, we pray.

We pray today for all who are stretched in the love and service they give;  
for all carers, at home, in hospitals and care homes,  
for all who offer support and counsel through social services and charities,  
for all who feel they are close to breaking point  
God of love, pour out your love, we pray.

We pray today for all who suffer because of hatred, greed and rivalry;  
for all caught up in war and conflict, especially at this time...  
for all whose lives are bought and sold, through modern day slavery  
for all who experience discrimination for being different from the majority  
God of love, pour out your love, we pray.

We pray today for all working to share the love of Christ in a broken world;  
for aid agencies, relief and development charities and their staff,  
for peace-makers and all involved in reconciliation

---

<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Jill Baker

for those seeking to welcome and support people seeking asylum  
God of love, pour out your love, we pray.

We pray today for the church around the world, seeking to live by love;  
for all who are persecuted for their faith  
for all who feel overwhelmed and under-resourced  
for each of us as we struggle to demonstrate your love to all  
God of love, pour out your love, we pray.

In a moment of stillness, we call to mind any for whom we particularly pray this day...  
any known to us who are ill or in hospital...  
any known to us who are housebound or lonely...  
any known to us who are depressed or suicidal...  
God of love, pour out your love, we pray.

We ask all our prayers in the name of Jesus, love incarnate, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

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

Thank you Lord, for all we have received – thank you for your many blessings to us.  
Help us to remember that all we have is gift, and to use those gifts for your glory, and  
for bringing a Kingdom of justice and joy a little closer,

In Jesus name

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

345 STF – And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood? OR  
350 STF – I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship

### **Blessing**

We shall go out with joy, and be sent forth with peace,  
May the God of joy and love and hope and peace go with us,  
Lifting our hearts in times of pain, and dancing with us in times of laughter.

Go in peace, and serve the Lord,

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

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

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