

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 22B

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

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Ordinary 22 - Year B
1st September 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

79 STF – I'll praise my Maker while I've breath OR

443 STF – Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

373 STF – Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire OR

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

Readings: Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Hymn:

706 STF – Longing for light, we wait in darkness OR

508 STF – Purify my heart, let me be as gold

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

477 STF – Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart OR

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

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart OR

498 STF – God of all power, and truth, and grace

Blessing

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Call to worship

Here we are, God of all grace,
Here we are, gathered in your name,
Gathered to worship you,
And to be a part of a justice-seeking movement here on earth,
We are the people of justice and joy,
The people of Christ,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

79 STF – I'll praise my Maker while I've breath OR

443 STF – Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

Opening Prayers

Prayer is, at least in part, an act of the imagination – a way of helping our human brains and bodies feel connected to something bigger than us – to the Big Love at the heart of creation, who we call God.

So we are starting our worship this morning with this activity: a simple invitation into imagination. *[Please note, you could extend the time allowed to this depending on how much time is available].*

Pause, for a moment, and picture a community that you are connected to or a part of – a village, town, a whole city, or even just a single street. It might be right where you live, it might be surrounding your church, it could be something to do with your work or a volunteer role you have (if you are school governor, for example), or it might be somewhere entirely different.

If you have time, you might like to encourage people to draw the community and provide resources for people to do this. They could sketch a simple map with stick figures, or something more extensive. Or you could find a picture on the internet, or even go and stand outside for a moment.

Looking at the community (in your mind, in your drawing, or similar), now imagine what it would look like if God's dream, God's hope, God's vision for this place became a reality.

These prayers are based on All We Can's 'Moving the Dial: Justice Seeking Church' resources. All We Can, the Methodist Church's official international development charity, operates under the vision statement: 'every person's potential fulfilled' – not because that is the role of one charity to bring that about, but because that is how we could summarise God's desire for the whole world. What would this place look like if every person's potential here was fulfilled? Every living creature? Every square inch? Can you even begin to imagine...?

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

Now take some time to describe it – you might like to go round the room and listen to people’s dreams, or invite people to draw, paint, write up, build from Lego (or similar) until they have begun to capture their dream.

Pray into that dream. Pray for the wisdom to see the role you have to play in bringing that dream one step closer today, next week, and beyond...Amen.²

We say together the Lord’s Prayer

All Age Talk

Let’s take a quick straw-poll – has anyone heard of the ‘Justice Seeking Church’ report?
[See who puts hands up, and ask people to help get ideas for what it is]

This is a resource from the Methodist Church, written and coordinated by Rachel Lampard, and adopted by the Methodist Conference last year. Importantly, this work doesn’t replace the church’s ongoing commitment to justice and peace, born out of Jesus’ earthly ministry and emphasised throughout Methodist history, right up to today. Rather, this piece of work hopes to help focus and gather our justice-seeking efforts together. To provide spaces where we can share together and achieve more. To help us ask and answer the question: what is mine to do?

This is the first of a series of five worship resources produced by The Vine, exploring each of the five priorities identified by the Justice-Seeking Church work, today’s theme is **Tackling inequality and poverty: seeking life in all its fullness**. Even if you are not leading worship or using The Vine in any other capacity this month, I do recommend looking up the other four in the series, or exploring the justice-seeking church pages of the Methodist Church website so you become familiar with the other priorities.

The story of scripture is one of a God who is interested in those experiencing poverty and those who are excluded. This is a radical challenge to the way our society works – to the hierarchies and structures and systems that give privilege and wealth to a few, while exploiting so many. God wants all human life to flourish, and the Jesus-invitation is to join a movement of people who are seeking justice and joy here on earth. Will you play your part?

The Justice-Seeking Church report identifies three areas where you might like to think about making a difference, and some of these are unpacked more in our reflection from the Joint Public Issues team, later in the service:

1. Connect – nurture relationship with people experiencing poverty to build new Christian communities, and work with those in power to help change our attitudes towards poverty and injustice. Practice togetherness, not ‘us and them’ thinking.
2. Campaign – raise awareness of the impact of the cost of living crisis on those in poverty; as well as building a longer term national anti-poverty movement aimed at putting the moral case to end UK poverty at the heart of the political debate as a new government beds in and seeks to listen to the nation.

² Opening prayers written by All We Can - allwecan.org.uk/practices

3. Support – engage with your local community, national and international charities who are supporting people who have been dragged into poverty. Your donations, your time, your prayers, your voice can all help to make a difference.³

Hymn:

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Reflections on the readings

The Bible has a revered place in the life of many Christians and many churches.

In lots of churches, at the start of a service people stand while a large Bible is opened or brought and placed on the altar, and stand again as the gospel is read. Verses from scripture are often displayed on banners and notice-boards, greetings cards and even t-shirts and car bumper stickers. In the homes of many Christians you'll find more copies of the Bible than any other book.

The Bible also has a prominent place in public life. Guests on the BBC's *Desert Island Discs* get given a copy automatically, presumably because it would make for dull radio if everyone chose it as the book they would take away with them. A few years ago, a Secretary of State for Education decided to send a copy of the King James Bible to every state school in England, to mark the 400th anniversary of its publication. The majority of newly elected MPs swore their oath of allegiance on a Bible.

In these ways and many others, we hold the Bible up as an honoured sacred symbol. And it is undoubtedly a gift from God to be treasured and valued. But is our espoused esteem for Holy Scripture reflected in our commitment to putting its core messages into practice?

In today's reading, addressed to one of the first Christian communities, James says that if you really want to honour the word of God, you need to live it out by doing as it says. We must "be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves" (James 1:22).

If we just receive or parrot scripture, we have missed the point. We need to put its imperatives into action.

This is reinforced when we remember that the word of God is not only what we read in the Bible but Jesus Christ himself, the Word made flesh who lived among us. The incarnation was about God's word being embodied in action on earth – in a man who fed the hungry, healed the sick, overturned tables, welcomed children and brought good news. James is calling us to follow the example of Jesus in enacting the word of God.

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

But where should we start in becoming ‘doers of the word’, when the Bible and the life of Jesus contain so many teachings and messages? James points to an answer at the end of the passage, where he says, “religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27). Throughout the Bible, orphans and widows are identified as those for whom God’s people are called to have special concern, as they represented among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in a society where power, wealth and status were predominantly held by male adults.

James is saying that if we want to become doers of God’s word, then we should show love and care for those who are on the margins of society.

What might that mean for us in the UK today? One of the major – and growing – causes of disadvantage and marginalisation in British society is poverty. More than 1 in 5 people in the UK are currently living in poverty. Nearly 4 million people, including over a million children, are classed as destitute, which means they lack the basics to be warm, dry, clean and fed. This is scarring the lives of individuals and communities.

Amelie, a mother of children aged 10 and 14, describes the impact of living in poverty on her children like this: “It all affects them and impacts on absolutely every aspect of their lives – their health, their mental health, relationships with family and their social lives. Inadequate provisions of food, heat and general wellbeing will leave an imprint throughout adulthood. It is the children who invariably suffer, they are disadvantaged, they will have fewer opportunities.”⁴

In 2023, the Methodist Conference adopted the report *A Justice-Seeking Church*, which explores what it means to be a church committed to challenging injustice in society. One of the priorities it identifies is tackling inequality and poverty, pointing out that God consistently shows a bias to those experiencing poverty and those who are excluded. It suggests three key ways in which people could respond, which reflect the themes of this passage from James.

The first is to support people who are experiencing poverty in practical ways. This is a very clear and obvious way to be ‘doers and not merely hearers’. Many individuals and churches will already be supporting food banks, hosting warm spaces, giving money, helping neighbours, and involved in other community projects that serve or include those who are vulnerable.

The second is to nurture relationships between people experiencing poverty and people with power. James encourages us to be “quick to listen” (James 1:19). Listening to those with first-hand experience of the struggle with poverty is a vital step in achieving lasting social change, because, in the words of the slogan of the disability rights movement, “nothing about us, without us, is for us”.

The third response is to campaign for changes to the policies and systems that are causing and deepening poverty. Poverty might make us feel angry, but James says, “human anger does not produce God’s righteousness” (James 1:20). Campaigning with others is a way of channelling our anger into action and seeking justice. The Methodist Church is playing a central role in Let’s End Poverty, a movement that seeks to increase the public and political will to tackle poverty in the UK. (*Visit the Let’s End Poverty website at www.letsendpoverty.co.uk to order postcards to send a message to the Prime Minister about poverty in the UK.*)

⁴ Quoted in the ‘Hope Starts Here’ project led by Changing Realities and the Child Poverty Action Group: <https://changingrealities.org/hope>

Justice is not simply an abstract concept, but something that must be enacted to be made real. If we take the Bible seriously, and if we take the instruction to be doers of God's word seriously, then we should be asking ourselves what part we will play in this. An encounter with the word of God should change us, and through how we respond, begin to change the world too.

As we reflect on what this means for us, may we be encouraged by these words from James: "Those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing." (James 1:25)

Questions for reflection and discussion:

How do you or your church show care for those on the margins of society?

Can you think of examples of how 'God consistently shows a bias to those experiencing poverty and those who are excluded'?

What difference might it make if more people listened to the voices of those who experience poverty?⁵

Hymn:

477 STF – Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart OR

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

Prayers of intercession

God of justice,
life-giving Word,
protector of orphans and widows,
hear us as we pray for your Kingdom to come.

We pray for good news for people trapped in poverty...

By word and by action

Bring life in all its fullness

We pray for liberation for those who are experiencing oppression and exclusion...

By word and by action

Bring life in all its fullness

We pray for strength for all who are suffering...

By word and by action

Bring life in all its fullness

We pray that those with power would use it to act for justice...

By word and by action

Bring life in all its fullness

We pray for peace in all situations of conflict...

By word and by action

Bring life in all its fullness

We pray that we who have encountered your word may become agents for your Kingdom...

⁵ Reflection written by Simeon Mitchell – Joint Public Issues Team

By word and by action

Bring life in all its fullness

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ,
who came to reach out to those on the margins
and to be the Word of Life for all.

Amen.⁶

We will now take up the offering.

Thank you gracious-God, for all the gifts we have received, for all the blessings that have come to us, for all the things we can put to use to build kingdoms and communities of justice, here on earth.

May these resources be blessed by you, guide our decisions, our committees and our individual motivations, to make this world a better place, in Jesus' name,

Amen.⁷

Hymn:

545 STF – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart OR

498 STF – God of all power, and truth, and grace

Blessing

Go from here, you justice-seeking people,
Go out resourced, energised and blessed by the love of God,
Go and discover that God is out there already, waiting for you, creating space for us to flourish, for us all to flourish, together.

Amen.⁸

⁶ Prayers of intercession written by Simeon Mitchell – Joint Public Issues Team

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁸ Additional prayers by Tim Baker