

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 18B

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

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Ordinary 18 - Year B
4th August 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

125 STF – Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer OR

421 STF – Empty broken, here I stand

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord OR

689 STF – Summoned by the God who made us rich in our diversity

Readings: 2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a; Psalm 51:1-12; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

Hymn:

433 STF – Out of the depths I cry to thee OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

322 STF – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds OR

252 STF – Jesus, the Lord said: 'I am the bread'

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

577 STF – Bread of life, hope of the world OR

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky

Blessing

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Call to worship

Gracious God,
Your love has called us here,
And here we have come, to worship, to pray, to praise, to receive, and to share your love
with the wider world.
Come amongst us, as we worship, by your Spirit, Lord God,
Amen.¹

Hymn:

125 STF – Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer OR
421 STF – Empty broken, here I stand

Opening Prayers

Generous and providing God,
we offer you our worship today as the God who knows and meets our need.

From the beginning of time, you have been at work, Creator God,
forming and sustaining a universe of beauty, plenty, order and wonder.

Throughout our lives you have been at work, Lord Jesus Christ,
filling us with your love, your grace, your healing.

In every moment you are at work, Holy Spirit of God,
energising us to live and work to your praise and glory.

For the times when we have abused your creation, taken it for granted and spoiled it for
others, we say sorry...

For the times when we have spurned your love, denied your grace, refused your healing,
we say sorry...

For the times when we have lived in our own strength and not in yours, marring your image
in us, we say sorry...

In humility and in wonder we see your offering of life for us,
we hear your words of forgiveness,
we stretch out to take the hand you are holding out to us,
and we rise cleansed and renewed, to live in your power, to your glory.

Thanks be to God. Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Jill Baker

All Age Talk

Over this last week we have been enjoying the 2024 Olympics! We saw stadiums full of people watching the opening ceremony, and more watching virtually. Then, we started watching some of the events. Hundreds of people will be spending the entire day in a single seat, waiting with excitement and trepidation to see who qualifies in Dressage, or who will get gold in the Men's Cycling Time Trial. If you had the chance, what sport would you want to see?

(Ask Congregation for feedback, would they want to watch a heat, or a final?)

Now, keep those events in mind. You are there all day, perhaps kept in your seat because of a long journey to get in and out of the stands, or you don't want to miss anything; What food would you bring? Would you even think to bring food?

The section of John's gospel that we are looking at during this season is full of crowd scenes. Last week we looked at the famous 'feeding of the five thousand' and how the miracle of abundance saw everyone fed, both physically and spiritually.

As we'll hear later in our service, Jesus is still being followed by crowds, and still on a bread-based theme too! I am the bread-of life, Jesus says. Have you encountered this life-giving, resource-filling Jesus?

Just as those who are at the Olympics will speak about their experience of being there and seeing the medals being awarded, or the records being broken; we can go forth and share our experience of encountering Jesus to others, to share our enthusiasm with others.

Let us pray.

Loving God, may we be enthusiastic in our sharing of your love, be in awe of the miracles we see day by day, and be open to experiencing you daily.

Amen.³

Hymn:

608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord OR

689 STF – Summoned by the God who made us rich in our diversity

Readings: 2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a; Psalm 51:1-12; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

Hymn:

433 STF – Out of the depths I cry to thee OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

Reflections on the readings

Perhaps most of us don't spend much time thinking about our ligaments – do you know where they are in your body? If you've ever torn a ligament, you certainly will! Ligaments

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

are mostly found in our joints – our knees, elbows, ankles, shoulders – and they hold things together, making sure that the bones in our joints don't twist too much or move too far apart and become dislocated. So it's really interesting that in this part of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he names ligaments in the body of Christ. *(Could link this to All Age slot on Olympics too if used – ligaments are important to athletes!)* Let's explore together what that might mean!

The passage talks about the need for us to grow up, not to be like children. We may immediately think about the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:3 which tell us we need to become like little children, and so seem to contradict this, but we understand that there are some qualities of children which are endearing and positive, and others which need to be left behind as we mature! The point Paul is making here is that we mustn't be 'tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine'. Rather, we need to be grounded, anchored, stable. Perhaps Paul was thinking about some of the travelling he had done by boat, as part of his missionary journeys. At times he was caught in some severe storms, so he knew how important it was for survival that a boat is not 'tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind' - a boat needs to be stabilised when at anchor and, when in motion, be equipped to harness the wind, not be destroyed by it. The NHS online description of ligaments is that they are 'like strong, firmly attached straps or ropes' – exactly what's needed for a boat to have any chance of surviving a storm.

We'll come back to what Paul is saying about being ligaments in the body of Christ after we've spent a few minutes with today's Gospel passage. These verses from John chapter 6 don't mention boats or a storm, but if we read the few verses immediately before this teaching, we see that (in verses 16-20) the disciples have just travelled by boat across the Sea of Galilee back to Capernaum. During that journey, a strong wind blew up, the lake became rough and they were (once again) terrified, not least because Jesus wasn't with them. Out of that frightening, dark scenario, Jesus approached them, walking on the water, telling them not to be afraid (which, we may imagine, only added to their terror!) An experience like that would not be easily shaken off – their fear still clung to them as the backdrop for the verses we look at today.

Meanwhile, back on the other side of the lake, the crowd who have been around, who yesterday were fed with miraculous quantities of bread and fish by Jesus, are also confused. They had seen the disciples leave by boat and they knew that Jesus wasn't in the boat, but that's all they know. So when some more boats appear, they take the opportunity to get into the boats and cross the lake themselves, eventually finding Jesus and immediately asking a whole series of very varied questions, beginning with the practical issue of how he got there and becoming progressively more searching...

- Rabbi, when did you come here?
- What must we do to perform the works of God?
- What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?
- What work are you performing?

There's a sense that the crowd too are still 'at sea'. They sound confused, uncertain, doubting and wondering, calling out their questions and uncertainties... just who is this man who fed them with bread and fish in the wild? How can they know he is really from God? What does that mean for their lives?

So Jesus is speaking to people who are unsettled, who need stabilising. In that context, what does he say?

- Jesus begins by telling them that their chief interest in him is to do with the food they received yesterday: 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you

saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves'. It's as if he is saying, 'Cut the piety and admit you're more interested in free food!'

- This is followed by a challenge to go beyond that response; 'Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.'
- The crowd answers by bringing up history – the miraculous feeding they've experienced has reminded them of the story from their scriptures of manna in the wilderness – what sign is Jesus going to give?
- Some conversation follows about where exactly that food came from (God, not Moses) then Jesus concludes: 'For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'
- It seems they have been won over, convinced, as they reply, 'Sir, give us this bread always.' And that leads to the well-known words of Jesus: 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

In a few verses their frantic questioning has become a plea for what Jesus is offering, 'the bread of life'. Sadly, if you read on through the rest of Chapter 6 of John's gospel, you'll realise that whilst the crowd may respond in this way, the religious leaders have more questions, debates, doubts and difficulties to come. These words are challenging for the Jews to hear and in verse 60, even the disciples exclaim, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' But for today, we leave the story there and pause to reflect on what it may mean for us that Jesus describes himself as the bread of life.

Bread is still, in many cultures, the staple food. Whether it's naan bread or baguettes, ryebread or chapattis, focaccia or sourdough, bread is very often readily available, relatively cheap, substantial enough to be satisfying and easily digested. Although today we may be much more aware of dangers and intolerances associated with bread, I think we can still accept that the image Jesus is offering is of a basic, important food.

Jesus was speaking at a time of high political tension in Israel/Palestine – the tensions between the power of the religious leaders and the ever-growing power of the Roman empire had unsettled the people and, as we know, Jesus himself became a focus for the continuing and escalating hostilities which ultimately led to his death. So he offers something simple, wholesome, easily understood, easily digested. Think of me, he says, as bread – something you need, something which won't let you down, something which will ground you, stabilise you, hold you to life. Perhaps today we too need to hear that offer and accept it – in these days of uncertainty and questions, of doubts and complexities, the simplicity and nourishment of bread may be exactly what we need.

Let's return to Paul as we finish, for he identifies and warns against some specific kinds of uncertainty and instability. 'Don't be tossed about', he says, 'by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming'. Undoubtedly Paul would have been speaking here into a specific situation in Ephesus. The Christian church was very new and the formation of doctrine was at an early stage. Paul and his converts didn't have two thousand years of Christian theology to look back over and study, as we do today, they were dependent on the teaching of the apostles as they worked out what it meant to be a Christian at all. What a remarkable thought!

Inevitably there were teachers around who thought differently, taught differently, suggested things which weren't compatible with the teaching of Jesus; but who was to decide what was right and what was wrong? In such a situation, believers needed to hold fast to the faith the early church was practising, constantly keeping truth and love as their foremost values.

Life is different for us today, but we too live in a very plural society, where almost every TV advert, every politician, every self-appointed life coach may offer their views about how we live, what choices we make, what lifestyle we adopt, how we spend our time and especially how we spend our money. So these words of Paul make sense for us too. We too need to hear what he wrote to the church in Ephesus, so let's hear again verses 15-16: 'Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.'

Every ligament is vital – just as it is for our physical body. Of course the human body is much more than ligaments, and Paul writes elsewhere of the importance of each part of the body working together, but for today, let's consider our calling to be ligaments – to hold things together. It's a high calling, for there are always voices and forces which are trying to tear people apart. We hear those voices all the time in our media and sometimes in our churches, the voices which talk about 'them' and 'us', or about 'insiders' and 'outsiders'... That's not how ligaments talk, ligaments are always looking for ways to hold things together. For us, that may be in our family, in our church, in our community, in our nation. For all of us, that's how we may be built up in love. Amen.

Some questions for reflection and/or conversation:

1. What are the qualities of childlikeness which Christians need to retain, and which are those which are better grown out of?
2. What or who have been the 'ligaments' in your Christian story, helping you to be anchored and stable?
3. In John 6, the crowd are shown as confused, anxious, uncertain, full of questions. Think about society today, what may be the questions which people are asking?
4. Does the image of Jesus as 'the bread of life' work for you? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. Are you aware now of different 'winds of doctrine' which may blow you off course? What may they be in our contemporary religious and spiritual climate?
6. How might you be more of a ligament in your own context?⁴

Hymn:

322 STF – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds OR

252 STF – Jesus, the Lord said: 'I am the bread'

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God, always more willing to listen to us than we are to pray, draw close now, we ask, as we come to you in faith or in doubt, in trust or in uncertainty, in hope or in anxiety, bearing the concerns we carry for the needs of the world.

- We offer our prayers for the church worldwide and the church in this place. Grant to us and all your children the courage to be those who make peace, who offer hope, who promote unity, who demonstrate wholeness.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

⁴ Reflection written by Jill Baker

- We offer our prayers for the nations of the world and for this nation. We see stories of greed, exploitation, corruption and fake news all around. Grant us the courage to be agents of change and of truth, and strengthen all who work for the good of others.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

- We offer our prayers for those we know who are in pain today, suffering in body, mind or spirit. In a moment of silence we hold their names before you, asking for your healing presence to draw close to them at this time...

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

- We remember those who have died, especially giving thanks for those who have demonstrated to us something of your love and grace and praying today for all who mourn their loss.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We ask all our prayers in the name of Jesus who knows each situation better than we do and whose love and healing are inexhaustible. Thanks be to God, **Amen.**

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

God of all grace,

We thank you for these gifts,

And we commit them to your Spirit again today.

Guide us, and all who will use these gifts of money, and the gifts of our lives, that they may be used for the demonstration of your love for each person and the whole cosmos.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

577 STF – Bread of life, hope of the world OR

663 STF – I, the Lord of sea and sky

Blessing

May you go out with joy and be sent forth with peace,

May the Spirit of the living God go with you.

May you be a blessing to others, and receive blessings from those around you,

Go in peace, hope and love, and in the power of the Spirit,

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker