

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
17th May 2020



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

296 STF – Christ has risen while earth slumbers

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

418 STF – We have a gospel to proclaim OR

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

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

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

53 STF – How shall I sing that majesty?

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

384 STF – Holy Spirit, rain down, rain down OR

28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

372 STF – Come down, O Love divine OR

476 STF – One more step along the world I go

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.

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

www.theworshipcloud.com

Call to Worship

May peace beyond all understanding,
which has its source in Father, Son and Spirit,
be with us as we meet,
to still our souls
and join our hearts as one.

May the gentle whisper of the God of grace
speak to us through our worship,
the reading and understanding of scripture,
and be the message of our lives.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR
296 STF – Christ has risen while earth slumbers

Opening Prayers

A prayer of adoration

May the nations praise you;
may all the nations praise you!

You rule your people with justice and wisdom,
bless them with grace and peace
and bring a harvest where your seed is sown.

May the nations praise you;
may all the nations praise you!

From generation to generation
you've led your people to the waters of life
and to fruitfulness where your love is shown.

May the nations praise you;
may all the nations praise you!

Amen.

A prayer of confession

Whenever self obscures the needs of others,
forgive us.

¹ Taken from The Act of Prayer by John Birch

Whenever we forget who is our neighbour,
forgive us.

Whenever we pass by on the other side,
forgive us.

Whenever we forget to say 'Well done!'
forgive us.

Whenever we forget the path we tread,
forgive us.

For all those times we bring sorrow to your heart,
draw us back into your forgiving arms
and teach us, once again, your way.

Amen.

A prayer thanksgiving

God of the moment
We thank you for all your blessings.

In the ebb and flow of daily life,
you shed light upon the way,
reveal the path that we should walk
and guide our hearts and souls in praise.

God of the moment
We thank you for all your blessings.

In the ebb and flow of daily life,
no darkness bars our way;
your glory shines in our hearts as we walk
where you would lead us every day.

God of the moment
You thank you for all your blessings.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

² Taken from The Act of Prayer by John Birch

All Age Talk

Often kids and even adults can have 'imaginary friends'.

Often if we have one, we speak to them about life's problems and even celebrate with them when things are good. Maybe we can remember what that imaginary friend we had was or is still called?

Jesus speaks in John's gospel reading today about the Holy Spirit and how it is there like an imaginary friend to support you. What is amazing is that the Holy Spirit does what is best for you and listens to you when you talk to it.

He being the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of God, which lives in us. This Spirit helps us know what is true. It is that voice inside, which helps us know right from wrong and teaches us how to make good choices. The Holy Spirit is a true advocate that is always with us, working on our behalf.

I wonder if we have spoken to the Holy Spirit today and welcomed Her into our lives?

If you would like to do that, would you say this simple prayer with me? Just say each line after me:

Holy Spirit

[Pause while congregation says 'Holy Spirit'].

My friend

[Pause, as above]

My comfort

Will you be with me,

Help in my day to day life

Give me energy

Guide me

Above all, I thank you for being in my life.

Amen.³

Hymn:

418 STF – We have a gospel to proclaim OR

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

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

Hymn:

463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past OR

53 STF – How shall I sing that majesty?

³ Taken from Palm Sunday Dialogues by David J Woodman

Reflections on the readings

In one of the most profound entries in his journal, in the Spring of 1958, Thomas Merton (monk, mystic, peace activist) wrote of how:

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut... I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers... As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are... And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun... the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed...

Merton holds together a deep love for humanity inspired by God, alongside a sense of the reality of the human condition, as often being full of sorrow and stupidity. Paul has a similar overall approach as he debates with the philosophers in Athens: in v.16 he is distressed to find it "full of idols", while in vs. 22 and 24-27 he sees people who are seeking God and who are loved by God. When we try to reach others with the Gospel, it is important, though sometimes difficult, to follow Merton and Paul here. I grew up in churches where much of the stress was on the sin and wickedness of humanity and it was often deeply depressing and made the Gospel seem like bad news not good. While I have listened to sermons where we are constantly told how fantastic and wonderful we are as people and I wondered why then, if we are so great, Jesus needed to bother living, suffering, dying and rising from the dead at all?

Paul takes his overall approach of an 'optimistic pessimism' about humanity and responds to folk wanting him to explain his message in a way which will make sense to them in their context and lives. He is doing here something which all Christians are commanded to do in 1 Peter 3, "Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence." I don't know about you but I'm not great at this, so perhaps we can get some top tips from Paul here? But also see where he has left us some difficulties to overcome and stuff for us to work out for ourselves?

The brilliance of Paul here is how he meets his audience where they are at, but he doesn't keep them there, he very quickly expands their horizons. Verses 24-27 are a masterclass of shifting understanding from gods to God with a capital G.

A God who is beyond our comprehension (in theological language, 'transcendent'), but also in verses 28-31 a God who is beside us in the closest of ways (in theological language, 'immanent'). It is beautifully done as he quotes poets and sources which his audience would see as authoritative to make his case. I remember witnessing an evangelist in Piccadilly Gardens quote the Bible to prove the authority of the Bible, to someone who didn't accept the authority of the Bible!

Paul's example here urges us to get on to the 'turf' of folk who know little or nothing of church and actually try to understand their thinking, speak their language, use

those they see as authoritative as you engage with them. I write this on the first day of lockdown in the UK (I hope by the time you read this you are no longer on lockdown!) in response to the Coronavirus; where churches and places of worship are shut down. This of all times should remind us of the words of Paul at the end of verse 24 that God, “does not live in shrines made by human hands”.

So far so good! But Paul, doing so well with the general philosophical stuff about God, then when he brings up the person of Christ he hits a brick wall (v.32)...well mostly (v.34). He fails to successfully build the bridge from the world of a Jewish Messiah to the beliefs and concerns of the gentile world. The success of the early church was built on a group of gentiles known as ‘God Fearers’ (think of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 and Cornelius in Acts 10), who were impressed with the ‘ethical monotheism’ of the Jewish faith, knew and loved the Jewish scriptures, but who were repelled by the food laws and especially the circumcision of Judaism. I’m sure we can understand how attractive the Christianity presented by Paul and others was to them: it contained all they found alluring in Judaism without the negatives. In turn they provided a bridgehead into the wider gentile community. We see here the failure of Paul to jump across a gap of understanding without the bridge of the ‘God Fearers’.

What about us? I would suggest that in contemporary England we probably no longer have a group of ‘God Fearers’ who understand our language and stories and who are sympathetic to our ethos. Here we need to learn from both the success and failure of Paul in Athens and find ways of sharing our stories, beliefs, ethos in places and mediums where we can create (or even find!) a new generation of ‘God Fearers.’ Also there is an obligation on those of us within the church to create a place and space where people want to be involved with us, because the other great evangelical tool of the early church was the contrast provided by the way Christians loved and cared for one another as against the brutal culture of their wider society. ‘See how those Christians love one another’ was the greatest missional tool of the first century. Today we have work to do both ‘outreach’ (to discover and create ‘God Fearers’) as well as ‘inreach’ where people will look at us and once again say, ‘See how those Christians love one another’.

Questions to consider, on your own or in small groups:

- In relation to people are you an ‘optimistic pessimist’?
- Did Paul fail or succeed in Athens?
- Are there ‘God Fearers’ in your community? If not, how can we create and facilitate them?

[After the conversation, bring people together with this prayer]

Let us pray.

Loving God in whom we live and move and have our being, give us courage to go outside our shrines and beyond our comfort zones to learn new ways of thinking about, speaking of and showing forth your love to people made in your image and

likeness. May we reach out and reach in, even becoming all things to all people, so all may know and experience the life in all of its fullness which Jesus came to bring. Amen⁴

Hymn:

384 STF – Holy Spirit, rain down, rain down OR

28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him

Prayers of intercession

Father of our risen Lord Jesus, all around us we see the work of your hands, you who created the earth, the moon, the heavens, the stars, the seasons, and all that dwells upon the earth. In you we live, we move and we exist. Be with and within us as we come before you to worship your name and bring to you our prayers.

To you our maker, defender, redeemer and friend we bring our prayers.

Lord in your mercy ...

Hear our prayers.

For the beauty of the world you created and gave to us, we thank you. We thank you for all of your creation and for your people throughout the world. We pray now for all of humankind as we think especially of those who are living in poverty. In a world where you have blessed us with so much, we pray that we will learn to share our resources with the poor.

We pray for those who are being persecuted, oppressed or called to stand up and defend their faith action. We remember those who are living with the effects of conflict. We ask that you give wisdom and courage to our leaders to resolve conflicts, take action on climate change and govern us in peace. Help those who suffer and give us the courage to defend them and work to bring relief to them wherever we can, in whatever way we can and whenever we can.

To you our maker, defender, redeemer and friend we bring our prayers.

Lord in your mercy ...

Hear our prayers.

Lord, for the church we pray for unity, godliness and love. We thank you for people who live their lives helping and supporting those who are struggling.

We thank you for people involved in ministry, who are helping others to find, to know and to love you. We pray that you will guide them in their work within your worshipping community, as they devote so much of their strength and their lives to reach out to others. Lord, give us the wisdom to make the church a welcoming place for all people.

⁴ Reflection written by Noel Irwin

To you our maker, redeemer, defender and friend we bring our prayers.

Lord in your mercy ...
Hear our prayers.

Lord your goodness in our lives is immeasurable. We stand before you in humble worship, to give thanks for your unfailing and never-ending goodness. We depend solely on you; we offer our gratitude for all your blessing and goodness. With a graceful, grateful and thankful heart; we say thank you, Lord. We pray for others, who are not so fortunate Lord. Meet them at their point of need. We pray now for those in our uniformed services, who so often risk their lives in serving and protecting some of the most vulnerable people. Bless them Lord and strengthen them. For the sick, we pray for healing, for the dying let your guiding angels to be with them and journey along with them. Our unspoken need we bring to you now in silence.

To you our maker, redeemer, defender and friend we bring our prayers

Lord in your mercy ...
Hear our prayers.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

Thank you Lord, for all you have given to us and all we have received. We respond to your grace with generosity – we give out of the enormous wealth we have received. We are yours, put us to what you will,

In Jesus' name.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

372 STF – Come down, O Love divine OR

476 STF – One more step along the world I go

⁵ Prayers of intercession by Lansford Penn-Timothy

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

God of grace, Spirit of hope, Christ who transforms us – send us out with your courage, your love, your peace to bring into a community and a world in need. Go in peace, and serve the Lord.
Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker