

# twelvebaskets



## ORDINARY 33A

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

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**Ordinary 33 - Year A**  
19th November 2023



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**446 STF – I will offer up my life OR**

**340 STF – Ye servants of God**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord OR**

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

Readings: Judges 4:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

**Hymn:**

**154 STF – Come, divine Interpreter OR**

**501 STF – Help us, O Lord, to learn the truth your word imparts**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**566 STF – Take my life, and let it be OR**

**661 STF – Give me the faith which can remove and sink the mountain to a plain**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**513 STF – Take this moment, sign, and space OR**

**504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour**

Blessing

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## Call to worship

The God of grace is here to welcome us,  
Jesus the Christ is here amongst us,  
The Spirit moves by ways we do not know.

Our God comes close, closer than we can imagine.

Come close, Lord Jesus.

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## Hymn:

446 STF – I will offer up my life OR

340 STF – Ye servants of God

## Opening Prayers

Holy God,  
We gather in your name today,  
Connecting again through the miraculous nature of your Spirit flowing through us.

God who created the universe,  
Christ who walked amongst us and continues to hold the cosmos together,  
Spirit who moves, inspires and uplifts us,  
We give you the thanks and praise this day.

Come Lord Jesus.

Loving God,  
We know we have not always lived up to your hopes for us.  
We have fallen short of your glory,  
We have missed opportunities and made mistakes,  
We have said, thought and done things we regret and which have hurt others.

We bring all that guilt with us today, and hand it over. We let it go.

And we hear your voice, reassuring us, accepting us. Our sins are forgiven.

*[Pause].*

Come amongst us today, Lord, as we worship you.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

## We say together the Lord's Prayer

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

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

## All Age Talk

This morning's Bible reading is a story that might be familiar to some of you already. It is entitled the Parable of the Talents. In this story Jesus the Son of God tells of a very rich man who was about to go on a long trip. Probably a holiday or a business trip, or something like that.

Before he did though he called three of his helpers and proceeded to give each one of them some of his wealth.

Now he didn't give them all an equal amount like you might expect. Instead he gave the first man five talents which was a lot of money! The second man he gave two talents which was not as much as the first but still a lot! To the third and final helper he gave one talent which was still more than he had ever seen in his life.

Now here's when the story gets interesting. The first man who received five talents put these to good use and received five more talents meaning he now had how many, can you guess?

That's right ten talents.

The second also invested his two talents wisely and earned two more talents. The third servant took his one talent and buried it in the ground for safe keeping.

When the master returned, he was very pleased when the first two servants told him that they had doubled his money. "Well done," he said. "Because you had been faithful with what I have given you, I will give you much more"

"How about you?" he asked the third servant. "What did you do with the money that I left with you?"

The third servant said to the master, "I knew that you were a hard man and I was afraid, so I went out and hid your treasure in the ground so that it would be safe. See, here it is"

The master was angry. "You are a wicked and lazy servant. You could have at least put my money in the bank where it would earn more." He then took the one talent from the lazy servant and gave it to the one who had ten talents.

In this story, we can sometimes read it as God being the master: the one who gives the talents and we are those helpers that receive them.

This story encourages us that we are all given things from God and that we are not to hide them away but to use them for God. What are the talents that God has given you to use? Will you hide them away, or find ways to use them this week?

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### Hymn:

608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord OR

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

**Readings:** Judges 4:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

## Hymn:

154 STF – Come, divine Interpreter OR

501 STF – Help us, O Lord, to learn the truth your word imparts

## Reflections on the readings

As part of our service today, we have already heard a traditional interpretation of today's Gospel passage, but does this interpretation work for you? It is one of the stories in the New Testament that fits into a group of sayings and stories from Jesus that we find a little bit uncomfortable and maybe wish weren't there.

Yes, of course at a surface level, you can look at this story as a way of saying: 'use what you've got'. 'Put your talents to work'. 'Don't hide your light under a bushel'. It's not a bad message, and Jesus is always clear that God wants every person's potential to be fulfilled, and using our gifts, but I just wonder if there might just be something else going on here.

What happens if we abandon our traditional interpretation and have another go?

The traditional interpretation hinges on one assumption, for which I can see no clear evidence in the passage: that the master / giver of gold is somehow meant to represent God. But is that really true? Jesus never seems to say so. Do we really believe in a God who would give more gold to people who were more talented already, or who would say 'to those who already have, more shall be given... and to those who have little, what little they have will be taken away'. This certainly doesn't seem to match with the image of the Kingdom of God that Jesus paints elsewhere in the gospels.

So, go with me for a moment here, what if it's the other way round...

What if this is not a story about how we should use what we have wisely (an interpretation that is helped by the confusing translation issue that the currency in this story is translated 'talents', the same word as we use for gifts/skills). What if, rather, it's a story about how unfair the world is and how many of us will be cast out by the system if we stand up to greed, or are unwilling to line the pockets of the wealthy with our hard work? Suddenly it becomes quite a different reading.

Here, we see the Master as a sort of archetypal capitalist overlord – someone who has plenty of wealth to spare, but only really wishes to use it to generate more.

'Wealth creators' is a modern phrase for this kind of master. He may not be evil, but he is certainly playing the game in order to benefit himself. Hence the story – he makes a small investment in three small businesses he is connected to, and leaves with an expectation of some return on his investment.

Of course, he does rather well out of the whole affair, his investments double in the two larger of the three businesses. But the third appears to function more as a nonprofit, or a social enterprise company. This third investment does not grow. The third businessman appears to operate counter to the system of greed and wealth creation.

He is doing something very different. He's protecting the money that isn't really his to spend, and getting on with other things – things which are far less money-related or not driven by profit.

Of course, in the capitalist market-economy of the story, the investor is bitterly disappointed. The counter-narrative offered by this third business doesn't help him get any richer, so he throws him out.

But is the Kingdom of God a capitalist market-economy? Is the master an investor?

As we head towards Christmas and Advent, it strikes me every year that the incarnation of God, the birth of Christ, breaks all the assumptions that people have about what that might look like. The Kingdom of God comes near, and hardly anyone even notices...

We are the people of the counter-narrative. The Jesus-stories are about a man who resisted the status quo and built a movement based around love, self-sacrifice, justice and peace. How are we building that counter-narrative today? As a church, and as individuals, have we fallen in with the master's way of thinking: profit, self-promotion and 'growth'? Or can we offer a different way of looking at the world, which goes 'not to those who need us, but to those who need us most?' That's a gospel that I can get on board with. That's an invitation to each of us to flip the script...

Lord, forgive me for the times when my head is turned by the world's agenda, by money and wealth. Show me how to stay focused on your Kingdom. At this point, you may wish to break into groups or breakout rooms. If that is not possible, you may just like to ponder these two questions in the quiet for a few moments, perhaps taking notes and then find a way to discuss your answers and reflections in the week.

Two questions for us to ponder today:

- How does the 'alternative' reading of this famous story from Matthew 25 make you feel? Have you heard it before? Is it helpful, or not really?
- Are there other places or stories in the Bible where there could be an 'alternative sermon' to the traditional messages we draw out? See if you can make a list of 3 or 4 stories and how they could be looked at a different way...

Let us pray.

Holy God, we thank you for your holy book, and the Living Word we can unpack from in your scriptures. Show us, today, how we can continue to be challenged and inspired by the stories we find in the Bible. Show us how to read, interpret and apply those stories today, and every day. In Jesus' name we pray,  
Amen.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hymn:**

566 STF – Take my life, and let it be OR

661 STF – Give me the faith which can remove and sink the mountain to a plain

### **Prayers of intercession**

Creator of all,

We live in a world where people are lonely, hungry, and trapped in poverty. There are many who live with anxiety and fear, have struggles to make enough money to pay their bills let alone have enough for anything extra in life, they are struggling with mental health issues and living with hopelessness. We know there are many who are deeply sad in our world and we lift them all to you Lord. You are the God of compassion and comfort, please be with those who are in need of your kindness. Pour your balm of gentleness upon our local and wider communities, and the

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

world, and help us to see glimmers of hope, signs of new life, sparks of joy that will show us the way we can make a difference in this hurting world.

Lord, fill our hearts with your love

**And show us how to share it with the world**

Loving God,

We thank you for our leaders. thank you for every person who steps up to lead whether in church, their workplace, in volunteering and in any public life. We know it can be costly and tiring, it can put a strain on their relationships and values. We pray that you will give our leaders fortitude and wisdom, patience and vision. We pray for our national and global leaders who are tasked with guiding us through a turbulent time. We pray that they will be able to see where people are struggling, hear the stories that their constituents tell them, and be moved to make our country and world a place we everyone can live life in all its fullness.

Please send your Spirit to be at work in our seats of local and national government, and minister to our leaders so that they will be led by your immeasurable love.

Lord, fill our hearts with your love

**And show us how to share it with the world**

Light of the world,

You cast out the darkness and provide a lamp to our feet. We name the people and places that lay heavy on our hearts especially those who are ill, bereaved, facing conflict or in desperate need of hope [*keep silence or allow people to name the people and places*].

You are a God who heals. We pray for reconciliation where there is division, abundance where there is scarcity, peace where there is war, hope where there is desolation, mercy where there is condemnation, justice where there is injustice, equality where there is oppression, love where there is hate, and generosity where there is greed.

Help us Lord to be faithful people who can seek your presence in every part of our lives.

Lord, fill our hearts with your love

**And show us how to share it with the world**

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

**We will now take up 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.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Sheila Matthews

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

**Hymn:**

513 STF – Take this moment, sign, and space OR

504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour

**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.<sup>7</sup>

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