

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

**Service Sheets
For the Month of
September 2025**

**Compiled by:
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Sunday 7th September 2025 – 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Rev'd James Pritchard

A Gathering Prayer:

O Lord, Creator of the universe, whose mind is freer than we can ever hope to be; a mind that is in all things and flows through all things. Children, servants, never slaves, we bow down before you, draw us close to your great love and mercy. **Amen.**

Hymn: Great God, your love has called us here (StF 499)

Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed;
we come, with all our heart and mind,
your call to hear, your love to find.

We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined,
yet seeking hope for humankind.

Great God, in Christ you call our name,
and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim,
but by your gracious love alone;
we strain to glimpse your mercy-seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends;
suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share;
give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do,
while love is making all things new.

Brian Wren Words: © 1975, 1995,
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A Prayer of Praise:

Great God of love, you who is beyond our imagining, love us more than
we can comprehend, we praise your holy name.
Steadfast God, we praise you for the precious gift of faith,
which gives substance to our hopes, draws us on towards your kingdom
and unites us
as we journey together through all the ups-and-downs of life. In you we
trust, faithful Trinity, Creator, Son and Spirit. **Amen.**

You may wish to pause to offer to God your own thanks and praise

A Prayer of Confession:

You may wish to use this Refrain: **Loving God, forgive us our failings and
help us to stop and think.**

Heavenly One, we confess that we stumble from day to day,
failing to consider our lives in the light of our faith. *Refrain*

We measure ourselves by the standards of society,
afraid what others might think, not you. *Refrain*

We become enslaved by worldly influences, filling our minds
with ideas that do not feed the soul and our lives
with things that bring only fleeting pleasure. *Refrain*

We recommit to the ways taught us by Jesus. Help us to count the cost of
following him. *Refrain*

Loving God, when we stray from you in mind or deed, you bring us gently
back.

When we rush headlong in the wrong direction, yours are the hands
holding us back from destruction. Forgiveness is in your breath and being,
giving us pause for thought at such wondrous love. We thank you for your

words of Grace that remind us that 'Your sins are forgiven'. **Thanks be to God, Amen.**

Reading Psalm 1

¹Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,
²but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.
³That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.
⁴Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Short reflection on Psalm 1

This psalm introduces the book, setting the tone and stressing that praise and reflection on God's Word belong together in the life of those who believe in God. It uses vivid similes to contrast God's people, 'the righteous' (a valuable, fruit-bearing tree) with the wicked (worthless chaff). It is God's purpose that the righteous should prosper, even if this is challenged by experience. It should not lead us to think that those who follow in God's ways will be blessed financially or with a life devoid of any challenge, rather even in our struggles we can have an assurance of God's presence and even know ourselves 'blessed'

- Why not spend a few minutes rereading the psalm, are there images or phrases that speak to you, do any resonate or jar? Ask God to speak to you through the words you read... How might you respond?

Hymn: Lord of creation, to you be all praise! (StF 449)

Lord of creation, to you be all praise!

Most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways!

Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,

and yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

Lord of all power, I give you my will,
in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.
Your bondage is freedom; your service is song;
and, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.

Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,
rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to find;
what eye has not seen and what ear has not heard
is taught by your Spirit and shines from your word.

Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;
I praise and adore you for all you impart,
your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,
your presence to shield me, whatever betide.

Lord of all being, I give you my all;
if I should disown you, I stumble and fall;
but, led in your service your word to obey,
I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

Jack Copley Winslow (1882–1974) Words: © Mrs J. Tyrrell

Philemon 1 1-21 New International Version:

¹Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— ²also to Apphia our
sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in
your home:

³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear
about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. ⁶I
pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in
deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake
of Christ. ⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because
you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

⁸Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what
you ought to do, ⁹yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as

none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— ¹⁰that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

¹²I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. ¹⁴But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. ¹⁵Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— ¹⁶no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

Luke 14:25-33 New International Version:

²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Reflection:

I wonder if you ever wish there were bits in the Bible that weren’t there? It might sound heretical to even say it, but I (James) sometimes think and even wish that! In different ways some of what we read in Luke 14 and in the letter to Philemon might fit into that, especially the bit about hating our families, for no matter how much they might sometimes drive us up the wall that can’t really be what God is calling us to do can it? Paul’s letter challenges me and my contemporary thoughts primarily on the basis of slavery itself, the letter seems to accept it as a part of life (which at the time it was), even in this passage Paul is trying to convince Philemon that Onesimus should now be welcomed as a brother rather than a slave. What does that say about all the other slaves, are they not worthy of being free too, is that not God’s will? Passages like this remind us that despite the Bible being our foundational document and means of understanding God’s will we cannot, nor can we say the Bible says... and simply pick that up and follow. There’s a whole host of reasons why but for today let’s just acknowledge that we sometimes need to seek God’s will in discerning its message and meaning for us today. So putting some of the problems with these passages in the parking bay (for now), what do they say to us? What of God’s ways and will do they reveal?

I’d like to suggest that both are about *the cost of discipleship* and if we take it seriously the change it enacts in our lives. This is driven home in Luke’s recording of needing to hate family in order to be a true disciple. Hate’ carries a strong meaning in English, but the implication and meaning here may be closer ‘not prioritising’. Discipleship is costly and demanding, even challenging us to think about the things we might hold most dear... Are we willing to give Jesus priority in our lives? What might we sacrifice for him? Jesus spells out the hard implications of discipleship by returning to the focus on the cross the symbol of God’s commitment to us. The

passage also uses parables - metaphors of building a tower and a king going to war to illustrate the importance of considering the cost before committing to being a discipleship of Jesus.

In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spells out what it means to follow Jesus. Famously, Bonhoeffer felt compelled by his commitment to Christ to act against the Nazi regime, in an assassination plot against Hitler that failed and was discovered. Bonhoeffer was executed. He had considered the cost but still did what he believed to be right. Would we do the same?

The cost of following Jesus can come in many forms. In the UK, we have freedom to worship God in safety, yet, for others around the world, worshipping God means risking their lives. Although we have freedom of worship, following Jesus in our society still has a cost. It may be a financial cost, as we give sacrificially to support the church, its mission and charities. But there is also the cost involved in how we live our lives, the daily decisions that we make, to ensure that our thinking aligns with what Jesus would want from us.

Following Jesus means that we might take decisions that make us stand out from the crowd. For example, we are called to treat everyone with love, to be loving and kind, forgiving and generous – not just to our friends and colleagues but to all we meet.

In the letter, Philemon had a decision to make about his runaway slave, Onesimus, who had become a Christian and a valued helper of Paul. Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother in Christ. What should Philemon do? Within the laws governing slave ownership he has every right to toss the letter away and set Onesimus to work. Yet Paul reminds Philemon that he was the one who led him to Jesus – the implication seems to be that therefore Philemon should do as Paul asks. A simple decision, you might think, but Philemon has great authority in the area, as a well-known and respected landowner who opens his house for people to come and worship God. If he accepts Onesimus back as a brother, in a time where slavery was normal, what would his neighbours and friends think? They might think he is weak, he could lose status in his community. There is another potential risk that Philemon's other slaves might decide to convert to Christ in order to gain their freedom. So perhaps it isn't a simple decision at all. We can only guess that, as the

letter still exists, Philemon did indeed accept Onesimus back as a brother but we don't know the costs of this.

In this passage Paul steps in, he intercedes on behalf of Onesimus, when have you interceded on behalf of someone else? Paul was in prison, but out of love he tries to make things right for his friend. Where does your discipleship challenge you to step in? Do you see injustice, do you find ways of acting in love, for example by writing to your MP, collecting for a food bank or raising money for charity? Stepping out in this way means risking standing out from the crowd. If Philemon did take Onesimus back, if he freed him from slavery, this would have had lasting effects on his status in the community. How does the cost of following Jesus affect us in our daily lives?

Following Jesus is a journey of trying to live more and more as he would want. Yes, we aren't perfect, and we will get it wrong, but we are forgiven, and we can keep trying. Are we prepared for the cost of following Jesus?

Prayer:

Loving God, you gave yourself fully for us, help us to follow you and your ways. Strengthen and encourage us, help us to live sacrificially trusting in you our source of life and hope.

Hymn: Will you come and follow me (StF 673)

Will you come and follow me

if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know

and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,

will you let my name be known,

will you let my life be grown

in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind

if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind

and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare

should your life attract or scare?

Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958) Words: © 1987, WGRG,
Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH Scotland. <www.wgrg.co.uk>

Prayer of Intercession & Lord's Prayer

Pause to remember the needs of the church, the local community, those in need those on yours hearts and minds. Name before God people and places you are concerned about and for this day. (You may wish to also pray the Lord's Prayer).

Hymn: A charge to keep I have (StF 658)

A charge to keep I have:

a God to glorify;

a never-dying soul to save,

and fit it for the sky;

To serve the present age,

my calling to fulfil;

O may it all my powers engage

to do my Master's will!

Arm me with jealous care,

as in your sight to live;

and O your servant, Lord, prepare

a strict account to give!

Help me to watch and pray,

and on yourself rely,

so shall I not my trust betray,

nor love within me die.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Final Prayer:

Faithful God, as we follow Jesus, make us kind; make us strong. Keep us alert; keep us learning as we in your ways. Walk before us, walk beside us, lift us when we stumble and keep us walking in your way.

May we know your blessing, you who is ever our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us this day and always. **Amen.**

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Sunday 14th September 2025 – 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Education Sunday

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Opening Prayer:

We come as many and as one to worship God the One-in-Three, to be encouraged and inspired, to praise the one who gives us hope. Lord, your very being calls us here; we long for your love, we ask for your leading. May we lift our lives to you today.

Amen.

Hymn: I will sing the wondrous story (StF 323)

I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me.
How He left His home in glory
For the cross of Calvary.

I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Threw His loving arms around me,
Drew me back into His way.

I was bruised, but Jesus healed me;
Faint was I from many a fall;
Sight was gone, and fears possessed me,
But He freed me from them all.
Days of darkness still come o'er me,
Sorrow's paths I often tread,
But the Savior still is with me;
By His hand I'm safely led.

He will keep me till the river
Rolls its waters at my feet;
Then He'll bear me safely over,
Where the loved ones I shall meet.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,

Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea

Prayers of Adoration and Confession:

Lord, who calls the lost to be found, who seeks to know us and be known,
we worship you.

We praise you for your constancy, your faithfulness, your unending love,
and your undiminished passion for the wellbeing of your people.

O God, when we have closed doors where we should have opened them,
forgive us.

When we have stayed in the box where we were called to break out,
forgive us.

When we have bubbled ourselves so thoroughly that we cannot even
perceive

what is outside our experience, forgive us.

When we have been gatekeepers instead of welcomers, forgive us.

May we ditch judgementalism, throw away condemnation. and learn how
to celebrate the loving invitation of your kingdom. **Amen.**

Hymn: Here the call of the kingdom (StF 407)

Here the call of the kingdom,

Lift your eyes to the King

Let His song rise within you

As a fragrant offering

Of how God rich in mercy

Came in Christ to redeem

All who trust in His unfailing grace

Hear the call of the Kingdom

To be children of light

With the mercy of heaven

The humility of Christ

Walking justly before Him

Loving all that is right

That the life of Christ may shine through us

*King of Heaven we will answer the call
We will follow bringing hope to the world
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name*

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross
Bringing peace and forgiveness
And a hope yet to come
Let the nations put their trust in Him

*King of Heaven we will answer the call
We will follow bringing hope to the world
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name*

Luke 15:1-10 - New Living Translation:

15 Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. ²This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them! ³So Jesus told them this story: ⁴“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. ⁶When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbours, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away! ⁸“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbours and say, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”

Thought for the Day:

Have you ever had one of those moments when you've lost or misplaced something – but you need it immediately? You knew exactly where it was (or where you thought it was), but it's not there now. And, instead of calmly thinking about it, you rush around looking in every conceivable place. It might be your keys, phone or glasses – finding it becomes so important that you won't settle until it's found. Jesus' two parables – of the lost sheep and coin – convey something of that feeling when you're searching and of the sheer relief and joy when you find whatever it is.

Let's look at the stories from two completely different viewpoints. If we had been one of the people welcomed by Jesus when others normally ignored us, the stories speak of a God who goes out of his way to search for us. God doesn't sit calmly and hope we will turn up. And that feeling of loss and frustration when we can't find something? God feels like that over anyone who doesn't feel welcome in or part of the kingdom.

Let's start with ourselves – do you know that God cares that much about you? Sometimes, it's easy to know in our heads that God loves us; but to acknowledge that God actually likes us is much harder. We know the things we get wrong, the times we haven't lived up to God's standards; but to hear that God loves us anyway is harder. It almost feels unjust; surely, we have to keep the rules, live the perfect life? God knows that isn't how humans are. Do you know in your heart, as well as your mind, that God truly and always loves you?

But consider the stories from another angle. The religious leaders of Jesus' time were passionate about serving God and behaving correctly. However, they were so fixated on doing, saying – and eating – the right things that they forgot that God's command wasn't only to love God, but also to love their neighbours. Instead of welcoming all, they had created a 'them and us' society. They had allowed their – as they thought, Godly – practices to blind them and prevent them seeing all the people whom God wanted them to love.

Do we do this too, at least sometimes? Do our ways of worshipping and serving God, of being Godly people, exclude others? Who isn't here with

us today? Why? The religious leaders, watching Jesus, blamed the sinners – they didn't keep the law; it was their own fault. But Jesus tried to show them that God welcomed these people even if they didn't. I wonder what Jesus would want to point out to us, about why people who aren't here with us don't come and may feel excluded. Could it possibly be that we are preventing them?

We need to remember two things: God loves us, and God wants us to welcome everyone.

Hymn: Brother, Sister Let Me Serve You. (StF 611)

Brother, Sister Let Me Serve You.
Let Me Be As Christ To You;
Pray That I May Have The Grace To
Let You Be My Servant Too.

We Are Pilgrims On A Journey,
And Companions On The Road;
We Are Here To Help Each Other
Walk The Mile And Bear The Load.

I Will Hold The Christ-Light For You
In The Night-Time Of Your Fear;
I Will Hold My Hand Out To You,
Speak The Peace You Long To Hear.

I Will Weep When You Are Weeping;
When You Laugh I'll Laugh With You;
I Will Share Your Joy And Sorrow
Till We've Seen This Journey Through.

When We Sing To God In Heaven
We Shall Find Such Harmony,
Born Of All We've Known Together
Of Christ's Love And Agony.

Brother, Sister Let Me Serve You.
Let Me Be As Christ To You;

Pray That I May Have The Grace To
Let You Be My Servant Too.

Prayers of Intercession:

Holy and Gracious God you, the one of prodigal grace. We give you thanks for the gift of life and for the blessings of this life, for family and friends and love abundant.

Lead us through the trials, the suffering and sorrow. The challenges and struggles, the tired time, despair and bleak places, back to you, and love abundant.

Be with those who weep or cannot sleep, who have no peace, who seek release
and comfort them with love abundant.

Fill us with hope, sustained in your mercy, with patience and stamina upheld by your Holy Spirit in your prodigal grace.

Transform us and all our broken ways, transform us that we can be made whole and in wholeness may we be the hands and heart of Christ.

Amen

Hymn: Beyond these walls of worship (StF 547)

Beyond these walls of worship
In the stress and joy of life,
Can we offer you our bodies
As a living sacrifice?
Will we keep you at the centre
Far beyond the Sunday call?
Will return to you,
Be transformed by you;
Still declare you God of all?

Beyond these walls of worship,
In the times of work and rest,
Will we display your love for all
When are faith's put to the test?
When the people that surround us

Deny that you are there,
Will we display our faith in you
In life, in praise, in prayer?
Beyond the walls of worship
may your spirit strengthen us
To make the whole of life our worship
As we witness to your love.
From this hour in your presence
Send us out now to proclaim
That will live our life as a sacrifice
To the glory of your name.

Blessing:

God of the lost,
open our eyes to see the world as you do.
Forgive us when we fail to see the lost.
Help us to look for those who need your love,
and give us the courage not only to offer them signs of your love
but, by our actions and words, to share your love with them.

Amen.

Sunday 21st September 2025 - HARVEST CELEBRATION

Compiled by Rev Liz Singleton. This service was first published in 2022 and was prepared for you to use at home. We pray that as we join together, wherever we are, we will be united through words, music and images as we celebrate our blessings at harvest time.

May the nations praise you, O God.

Yes, may all the nations praise you.

Then the earth will yield its harvests,

And God, our God, will richly bless us. *Psalm 67:5–6*

Hymn: Come, ye thankful people, come (StheF 123/H&P 355)

Come, ye thankful people, come!

Raise the song of harvest-home!

All is safely gathered in,

Ere the winter storms begin;

God, our maker, doth provide

For our wants to be supplied;

Come to God's own temple, come,

Raise the song of harvest-home!

All the world is God's own field,

Fruit unto his praise to yield;

Wheat and tares together sown,

Unto joy or sorrow grown;

First the blade, and then the ear,

Then the full corn shall appear;

Lord of harvest, grant that we

Wholesome grain and pure may be.

For the Lord or God shall come,

And shall take his harvest home;

From his field shall in that day

All offences purge away;

Give his angels charge at last

In the fire the tares to cast,

But the fruitful ears to store
In his garner evermore.

Even so, Lord, quickly come;
Bring thy final harvest home;
Gather thou thy people in,
There for ever purified,
In thy garner to abide:
Come, with all thine angels come,
Raise the glorious harvest-home!

Henry Alford (1810 -71)

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Beautiful God, you are present in each sunset and heard in each bird's song.

All the colours of the rainbow are found in you, all the depths of the oceans reveal your vast and endless power and mercy. Each ear of corn pledges your promise to sustain us all.

Amazing God, you looked at everything you made and saw it was good, yet you are prepared to welcome those who have misused and spoilt your creation. You forgive our greed and unwillingness to share what is not ours to hoard. You see your creation battered and abused, yet lovingly re-create new and wonderful things as you lovingly, re-create us through your Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus.

Forgiving and merciful God, we see your beauty and love perfectly revealed in Jesus. Forgive us and restore us to newness of life, through him who died to save our world. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Reading: John 6: 1 - 13 Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

..... Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick. Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him. (It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration.) Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.

Philip replied, "Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!"

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?"

"Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

Poem: 'The more you give' by Helen Steiner Rice

*The more you give
The more you get
The more you laugh
The less you fret
The more you do unselfishly
The more you live abundantly
The more of everything you share
The more you'll always have to spare
The more you love
The more you'll find
That life is good
And friends are kind
For only what we give away
Enriches us from day to day*

Hymn: We plough the fields and scatter (StF130/H&P 352)

We plough the fields, and scatter
The good seed on the land
But it is fed and watered

By God's almighty hand;
He sends the snow in winter,
The warmth to swell the grain,
The breezes and the sunshine,
And soft refreshing rain.

*All good gifts around us
Are sent from heaven above;
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord,
For all his love.*

He only is the maker
Of all things near and far;
He paints the wayside flower,
He lights the evening star;
The winds and waves obey him,
by him the birds are fed;
much more to us, his children,
He gives our daily bread:

All good gifts around us...

We thank thee then, O Father,
For all things bright and good:
The seed-time and the harvest,
Our life, our health, our food.
Accept the gifts we offer
For all thy love imparts,
And, what thou most desirest,
Our humble, thankful hearts:

All good gifts around us.....

M Claudius (1740-1815)

Reflection:

A man was hiking in a remote part of the world and on the path he noticed a stone – it was an unusual shape and had beautiful striations running through it. The sort of stone you pick up and put in your pocket – and that's exactly what he did. He walked on, and as the sun began to sink lower in the sky he deviated off the main path and headed for a small

village where, at best, he hoped to find a bed for the night, at worst, a place to pitch his tent and maybe be offered some food.

Well, he realised quite quickly that this village wasn't the friendliest of places. Everyone looked on him with suspicion, no-one welcomed him or even offered him a drink. He began to think this had been a bad mistake. Eventually he managed to strike up a conversation with one of the locals and learned that this had been a bad year for the village. Their crops had failed, and the people were starving. No-one was willing to share what little they had for fear of losing everything and the atmosphere in this little community had become very tense. Being a Christian the man prayed, asking God if there was any way he could help these people. Then he had an idea.

He called the villagers together in the village square and told them the story of Jesus feeding the 5000. He told them how generous God is and how he loves all people. Then he said, "I'm going to feed you by making some stone soup! You'll love it! It's delicious!" He took the stone out of his pocket and the villagers laughed. "That's the most ridiculous thing we've ever heard!" they scoffed.

"Just trust me," replied the man. "Now, I need a cooking pot." One of the women quickly volunteered her pot. "And I'll need about two buckets of water." One of the men, still shaking his head in bemusement, brought the water.

The stone was placed in the pot with the water and placed over a fire. The villagers were getting curious now and gathered around to see what happened. The man began to lick his lips. "You know, stone soup tastes even better with some carrots." "I've got six carrots," one of the villagers exclaimed, and rushed off to fetch them. The carrots were cut up and placed in the pot. "Mmmm," said the man, "this smells good, but I think some potatoes would add more flavour." From pockets and other hiding places about a dozen potatoes were produced and quickly added to the soup. Some people left the group, returning with pieces of celery, onions, and even chunks of meat, all of which were placed in the pot.

An hour later the whole community was gathered around the soup pot, eating together. They had fed each other by sharing what they had, no-one had gone short, everyone had sufficient to meet their needs. Then they remembered the man's story about Jesus and how he had told them about the God who loves all people and who, in his generosity, has supplied enough for our needs, and reminds us to share what we have so that no-one ever needs to be starved of life's essentials.

Prayers:

*He brought me to his banqueting house and his banner over me is love.
(Song of Solomon 2 v 4)*

Bountiful God, you provide resources for all,
yet land goes untillied, crops unharvested because of warfare.
Bring your peace to troubled lands so that swords become ploughshares
and wastelands become fruitful once more.

Bring them to your banqueting house underneath your banner of love.

Lord, where resources are misused, people exploited by greed and selfishness,
hear the cries of the oppressed.

May your Holy Spirit move the consciences of those in power,
inspiring them to work for a fairer and sustainable way to use what you have given.

Bring them to your banqueting house underneath your banner of love.

Lord, we hold before you the farmers, who work long and often difficult hours.

We pray that you will provide for their needs, as through their vocation they provide for so many other people.

Bring them to your banqueting house underneath your banner of love.

Lord, we pray for those we know who especially need your strength at this time.

Those who are struggling with ill health, physically or mentally.

Those who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

May they be nourished by your grace and peace.

Bring them to your banqueting house underneath your banner of love.

Looking forward to that day when Jesus calls us all to his eternal banquet
in glory,
the ultimate harvest of souls safely gathered in. Amen

Poem: 'When we see harvest' by Susan Y Nikitenko

*A harvest of apples, a harvest of corn;
A harvest of plenty, an autumn adorned.
With bright coloured leaves, a full festive blend;
A wonderful time for families and friends.
A harvest of marrows, a harvest of grain;
A harvest of bounty, and cool autumn rains.
A big harvest moon – way up in the sky;
A harvest of blessing that God has supplied.
Be grateful, be humble, give thanks to the Lord;
He has showered his blessing here in our world.
But have we been faithful, and have we been true?
Have we put God first in all that we do?
A harvest that God sees is not food or crop;
Not marrows, or grain, not apples that drop.
God sees the harvest of souls needing him;
A harvest of people being saved from their sin.
A harvest of souls and a harvest of love;
A harvest of mercy from our Father above.
When we see the harvest, let's see through God's eyes;
And share with all people the life he supplies.*

Hymn: Yes, God is good (H&P 363)

Yes, God is good – in earth and sky,
From ocean-depths and spreading wood,
Ten thousand voices seem to cry:
'God made us all, and God is good'.

The sun that keeps his trackless way
And downward pours his golden flood,
Night's sparkling hosts, all seem to say
In accents clear that God is good.

The merry birds prolong the strain,
Their song with every spring renewed;
And balmy air and falling rain,
Each softly whispers: 'God is good'.

We hear it in the rushing breeze;
The hills that have for ages stood,
The echoing sky and roaring seas,
All swell the chorus: 'God is good'.

For all thy gifts we bless thee, Lord,
But chiefly for our heavenly food,
Thy pardoning grace, thy quickening word,
These prompt our song, that God is good.

John Hampden Gurney (1802-62)

Blessing:

Lord of the harvest who has given us so much;
help us to be generous like you,
that the world may know your goodness and blessing.
And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
remain on us, and be made known through us,
now and always. Amen

Sunday 28th September 2025 – 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.

May you find it to be a time of blessing.

Call to Worship:

We come today to glorify God,
through our hymns, prayers, meditation,
reading His Word and reflecting on it.
We come as members of His family,
brothers and sisters together joined
by the hand of fellowship. **Amen.**

Hymn: All my hope on God is founded (StF 455)

All my hope on God is founded;
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance He guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
He alone
Calls my heart to be His own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep His wisdom passing thought;
splendour, light, and life attend Him,
Beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore
from His store

new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at His hand;
joy doth wait on His command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ His Son.
Christ doth call
one and all
ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges (1844 – 1930)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Loving God, we praise You, not only when the sun is shining, but when rain seems endless.

For just as a seed needs both sun and rain if it is to grow,
so faith becomes stronger, lives become more fruitful,
if we root them in the rich and solid earth of Your love.

For the love You have shown us as sometimes reluctant disciples;
Your patience in being with us when we decide to go our way;
Your hand that is there for us as we stumble or are anxious;
Your gentle whisper reminding us that You will never let us go;
for all of this and more besides what can we do but offer You now the
worship of our hearts and lives. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Heavenly Father, we confess that we are rarely content,
craving things that we think will bring us status or make us happy,
but their pleasures are fleeting and we always want more.
Father, we repent of our dependence on material things
and our craving for the money to buy them.

We turn our thoughts instead
to the generosity of your loving heart.
We commit ourselves to treasuring the abundance
of love and joy with which You bless us, and to sharing it,
so that greater contentment may be known by all.

Time and time again, O Lord,
You forgive us for filling our lives
with things bought by money,
instead of finding our fulfilment in You.
You forgive us our discontent
and our failure to spend our wealth wisely
and for the good of others.
Thank you for Your generous forgiveness,
when we have lacked generosity ourselves. **Amen**

**You may like to join in the words of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who
art in heaven ... Amen**

As we come to our Gospel reading from Luke which is graphic and
challenging, we need to remember that Jesus told it to a specific group of
people at a specific time for a particular reason.

Reading: Luke chapter Luke 16: vs. 19-31 NSRV

Introduction:

Jesus' Parable replays a familiar theme in Luke's Gospel – the rich man
reminds us of the rich fool (12:16-21) and the selfish son (15:11-32)
among others – by portraying a common scene in the world of Luke's
audience. Poor, destitute people are forced to beg, and their unavoidable
presence is as likely to meet with cold indifference as compassion. The
poor man, Lazarus, receives more care and attention from the feral dogs –
licking his sores is an antiseptic – than the rich man, despite living so close
to his table.

The Rich Man And Lazarus

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and
who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man
named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger

with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.

²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.'

²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.'

²⁷ He said, 'Then, Father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'

²⁹ Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.'

³⁰ He said, 'No, Father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Hymn: When I needed a neighbour (StF 256)

When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

*Chorus: And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
were you there?*

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?

I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?

I was cold, I was naked, were you there?

When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a shelter, were you there?

When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a healer, were you there?

Wherever you travel I'll be there, I'll be there,

Wherever you travel I'll be there.

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
I'll be there.*

Sydney Carter (1915 – 2004)

Reading: 1 Timothy chapter 6 vs. 6 – 19 NSRV

Introduction:

The concluding chapter of Timothy focuses on where real contentment is to be found – not in the pursuit of worldly wealth but in Godly living. True riches come from God and should be shared generously. Timothy is urged to treasure what will endure and, above all, to fight the good fight of faith.

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Paul's Charge to Timothy

¹¹But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings

and Lord of Lords.¹⁶ It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.

¹⁷ As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,¹⁹ thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Reflection:

During the summer, a second series of a television programme called 'The Fortune Hotel' was screened - you may have watched it. It intrigued me because I am a 'people watcher' and the programme is rich that! If you haven't seen it, here's a resumé: Eleven couples travel to the 'Siversands Grenada Resort' in the Caribbean. Their aim is to win the contents of a suitcase containing £250,000. Eleven couples arrive to find only ten suitcases - one pair will be returning home at the end of the day. Each chooses a suitcase through a series of daily tests and challenges trying to win the opportunity to either swap their case with another couple or stick with the one they have. By using their perception and powers of deduction, they have to work out who has the case with the money in. One case contains an 'Early Checkout Card', and whoever chooses that has the opportunity to send another couple home empty handed. The idea is to try and pair up with another couple that they can trust - but with quarter of a million pounds at stake, you can trust no one. You soon get to realise that people will go to any lengths to trick others into believing they are safe. Everything changes: people's moods, language, temper and behaviour change unbelievably in the desperation to win and as one pair is eliminated each night, the scheming grows more cunning and cruel. My point is that the couples will stop at nothing - no matter how it visibly changes them in order to win. The money is their goal. Will it bring happiness, peace, joy or contentment! I very much doubt it. They are not the people they were. They could easily change places with the rich man in the Parable we read today.

The story is primarily directed at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and their rich living compared to those forced to beg on the streets. They had become very complacent. They had learned how to make the best of both worlds - serving God and rich living. So Luke tells us that Jesus tells them this story. We can assume the man's wealth by his wearing fine, purple linen - reserved for the rich and powerful. He also fared sumptuously every day. Then comes the poor beggar Lazarus, reduced to lying at his gate every day, having to be content living on scraps that people would feed him. This was an everyday experience all too familiar. Beggars squatting at the outer doorways of rich men's houses were an all too familiar sight. They lived on the generosity of what the householders would give them, supplemented by the charity of passersby. Lazarus was so like many of them, a pitiable wreck of a man, clothed in rags, possibly disease-ridden, his only companions the scavenging dogs which prowled the city streets existing like him on scraps of food. The Pharisees listened with indifference. They were fully familiar with the situation which they considered a normal feature of society, so why bother to try and change it? Jesus had a very different outlook on the plight of those forced into this way of living, so He goes on with words that jolted the Pharisees into listening with a graphic picture of how these two men would be received into resurrection life - a complete reversal of their respective fates. The story then, was intended to show up the unworthiness of the Pharisees and those they represented. Their ultimate loss of all the good things they enjoyed and the expectation of Divine favour for those previously excluded becomes clear. It's an unnerving story but it reminds us how God reverses the standards of this world.

Jesus isn't saying that wealth and possessions are wrong - on the contrary - used compassionately, they can make a great difference to the way others live. What Jesus was saying was that a life devoted to pursuing wealth and possessions will not buy favour with God - which takes us back to the 'Fortune Hotel' where acquiring the quarter of a million pounds becomes the only goal of those taking part.

We pick up this theme in Timothy's first letter shared with the early Christians in Ephesus. This letter along with 2 Timothy and Titus are attributed to Paul and are known as the pastoral letters because they are

concerned with the work of pastors in caring for the communities they served. The passage we read looks at the obligations of the wealthier members of the community towards those in need. "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it [v.7]. Timothy is commended to follow the Christian walk. It is one of generosity, because all of life is a gift. It is a challenge to share our riches in acts of kindness, sharing the good news of life with Jesus and being good stewards of all the gifts we are blessed with. This is how we store up our treasures with God.

Perhaps you could spend a few moments considering these words:

Money will buy:

A bed	but not sleep
Books	but not brains
Food	but not appetite
A house	but not a home
Medicine	but not health
Finery	but not beauty
A crucifix	but not a Saviour

What kind of wealth are we seeking? We celebrate the wealth of God's love in Jesus Christ. The wealth of God's love brings us what the wealth of the world cannot touch: peace, understanding, fulfilment, life. These things are eternal.

Let's make sure we never get the 'Early Checkout Card'. **Amen.**

Hymn: 'Come O Fount of every blessing' Tune: NETTLETON or alternatively 8.7.8.7 D (Methodist Hymn Book 517)

Come, O Fount of every blessing;
tune my heart to sing Your grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious measure,
sung by flaming tongues above;
O the vast, the boundless treasure,
of my Lord's unchanging love!

Here I find my greatest treasure;
here by Your help I've come;
and I hope, by Your good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
shed for me His precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace Lord, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to You.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
take my heart; O take and seal it;
seal it from Your courts above!

Robert Robinson (1735 – 1790)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

Loving God,

we pray for those who wait at the gate.

For those who wait at the gate in poverty, seeking essentials from foodbanks, unable to afford to turn their heating on, walking the streets to save using fuel at home, forced to sit in shop doorways and beg. We pray for all in poverty and need that those who have will see and respond to the needs of those who have not. We especially ask that You will bless those who are planning winter warmth projects to provide support for those struggling as a result of spiralling living costs.

Loving God,

we pray for those who wait at the gate.

For those who wait at the gate because they have nowhere else to wait; for those whose homes have been destroyed by flood, fire or conflict; for those whose home has been bombed; for those who cannot afford a home. We pray for all who are homeless or whose homes are insanitary or unsatisfactory. We commend to You those charities that seek to provide

aid to all in need, for those who welcome refugees, for those who provide emergency shelter.

Loving God,

we pray for those who wait at the gate.

For those who wait at the gate in sadness and grief, for those whose lives have been torn apart by the death of a loved one, for those who struggle to cope, for those who can't find a way to fit in. We pray that they may find the comfort and strength that Your presence offers.

Loving God,

we pray for those who wait at the gate.

For those who wait at the gate of the Church, for those who have been rejected or abused, for those who fear they will be turned away, for those who don't know how to access Your strength and love. We pray that our Churches may be inviting places of welcome where no-one is turned away and all are helped to experience the grace and peace that You offer.

As we enter the gates of our homes, our Churches, our lives, give us eyes to see those in need and hearts to respond in the name of our Saviour Jesus. **Amen.**

Hymn: Now thank we all our God (StF 81)

Now thank we all our God,
with hearts and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom this world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us in His grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills

in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son, and Him who reigns
with them in highest heaven,
the one eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore,
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart (1586 – 1649)

A Closing Response:

Have we laid up our treasures in heaven?
The land where no moth shall consume,
No beautiful links shall be riven,
No frost blight the lily's fair bloom.

Have we laid up our treasures by caring
For those who are lonely and sad?
Each gift and each happiness sharing,
To make others grateful and glad.

Have we laid up our treasures by trusting
the Father, whose help is now nigh?
Our lives to His counsel adjusting,
And serving the Master on high?

Have we laid up our treasures in heaven,
Rich treasures of faith, hope and love?
If so, what bright stars shall be given,
What blessings await us above!

Wonderful treasures, heavenly pleasures,
Never to perish, nor fade away;
Wonderful treasures, heavenly pleasures,
Are we laying up treasures today?

Eliza Edmunds Hewitt (1851 – 1920)

Blessing:

May we live in the richness of God's love, the Light and Peace of Jesus and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit today and every day. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots for Churches'

Our printed services do not include an offering but if you feel you would like to respond to God's love in this way please contact the treasurer of your church or contact the Circuit Office. Thank you.

If you no longer wish to receive this printed sheet, could you let either your Minister or the Circuit Office (tel: 01782 612648) e-mail: northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk know please, or equally, please let us know if there's someone you know who would like to receive it.