

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Judges 4:1–7

Psalm 123

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Matthew 25:14–30

SELECTED READING AND THEME:

Psalm 123 and Matthew 25:14–30 – Looking to God with trust

CALL TO WORSHIP

Lift up your eyes to Holy One,
look out to see the Divine.

Lift up your hearts with trust in God,
look within and know God with you.

Lift up your voices in praise of Holy One,
look to the song and sing to Holy Three. Amen.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Look on us with mercy, we pray,
reach out to us with care.

Look to us with love, as ever
you have for your beloved creation.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy One of mercy,
we have been ungrateful,
received your grace as a right,
not recognising it as your gift.

Holy One, Holy Three,
forgive us again, we pray.

Holy One of justice,
we have been afraid,
received your holiness with fear
and let fear diminish our living, our life.

Holy One, Holy Three,
forgive us again, we pray.

Holy One of love,
we have been scornful,
received your love with disdain
and failed to love you and each other.

Holy One, Holy Three,
forgive us again, we pray.

Holy One: Mercy, Justice, Love,
we return to you ready for grace,
open to love, shedding our fear:

Holy One, Holy Three,
forgive us again, we pray.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Hear these words, friends,
hear and take them in:

Holy One sees us,
knows us and frees us
from the lifelessness that follows
our turning from God, our source of life.

Return with trust in love,
in mercy, in holy justice
unlike what we can imagine.
Trust: and be at peace. Amen.

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING

May our living show our love for you, Holy One,
our trust and our adoration as we seek to honour you. Amen.

DISCIPLESHIP THOUGHT

If we consider Psalm 123 alongside Matthew 25, we might discover a juxtaposition of fear and trust.

In Psalm 123, 'I' look to God as a servant looks to their master; as one in a relationship of imbalanced power. A servant must trust that the one with power in this relationship will not abuse it but will act with a mutuality that respects the dignity and worth of the other as bound up with their own.

In Matthew 25, the slaves who trust the trust their master places in them find an abundance of life. The enslaved person who allows fear to govern their actions finds life diminished. Could it be that Jesus here is not making a point about God as akin to this master but using a well-known situation from the experience of an audience of disempowered people to show them their own behaviour? This series of parables and warnings, in which our passage for today is but one part, may

perhaps be understood as Jesus using strong examples with harsh consequences, not to describe God as a harsh master but to highlight the life and death implication for half-hearted discipleship. What if we don't concentrate on the one dishing out the consequences but on the consequences and the agency of those who can choose one path or another?

Following the way of Jesus is not an easy ticket, a hands-free ride to eternal life. It is a life of discipline, of enacting the teaching of Jesus. We might look ahead to Matt 28: 'as you go, ... teach each other to obey [to follow, to align yourselves with] the way I have taught you.' Jesus has taught a disciplined, self-giving, justice-enacting way of living with trust in God and commitment to the command to love.

OFFERTORY SENTENCE

With trust, in freedom, we give seeking abundance for all.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Take what we offer, O God,
and may it grow life in abundance for all –
our offerings of money, of time,
of ourselves and our presence.
May it be enough,
and may all have enough. Amen.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

We pray for people and places where there is not enough:
where children starve
and parents watch, helpless
where animals wander
in search of habitat, lost
where doctors and nurses make do
but cannot heal, cannot save
where politicians do deals
and compromise more than they gain
where our elders languish
in lonely isolation
where communities re-live trauma
through and long after-violent disruption
pause

Holy One, we lift our eyes to you,
we look up, not away,
we look to each other and to you
in response to the needs of the world,
and we hope, we trust, we pray
for love to meet these needs,
for love to be enough for life to begin again. Amen.

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

Lift up. Look up. Stand up
and go into the world that God loves,
and love that world into life.

Do not be afraid,
but trust your Holy One,
with you, before you,
in you, through you,
loving all into life. Amen.

HYMNS

Judges 4:1–7

Freedom is coming	ATOK.355
O God our help in ages past	TiS 47
We are marching in the light of God	TiS.666

Psalm 123

In our darkness	TiS.725
Inspired by love and anger	TiS.674

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Wait for the Lord	Taizé
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Matthew 25:14–30

God Version 1.0	ATW.459
Let us talents and tongues employ	TiS.537
Take this moment, sign and space	ATOK.414