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ORDINARY 21A

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A short act of worship for use in peoples homes while churches are closed.

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Call to worship

God is here, as we, God's people, gather to praise, to pray and to reflect. Move amongst us, by your Spirit, that we might see your Kingdom come, your will be done. Amen.¹

Hymn: 36 STF – There's a quiet understanding - [YouTube](#)

Opening Prayers

Let us create a space for the Spirit, this day.

Let us pause, and be still, and listen to the word of God.

Let us listen to the quiet understanding that comes from gathering in the Spirit, whether we gather physically or gather as part of God's whole church, meeting on this Lord's day, around the world.

Let us open ourselves up to the love we feel in Jesus, to the promise that you love us, as we gather today in your name.

Let us feel that sense of openness, with our brothers and sisters around the world, that quiet understanding.

Let us give our thanks and praise to you, gracious God.

Let us pray, in the quiet...

[Hold a moment of stillness].

Come amongst us, holy God, clear our hearts and minds from distractions and turn our thoughts to you this day.

May we be at one with you, though Christ our Lord,

Amen. ²

We say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Exodus 1:8 – 2:10 - [Click for Reading](#)

Romans 12:1-8 - [Click for Reading](#)

Matthew 16:13-20 - [Click for Reading](#)

¹ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers by Tim Baker

Reflections on the readings

It doesn't matter how old we are or what we are doing in our lives, we all have to follow rules. We have to obey the law, and we also have rules for our schools and workplaces.

Why do we need rules?

The main reason for having almost any set of rules is to keep us safe. For example, the law says you have to be 17 years old before you can drive a car, as we have to be sure we keep all drivers, walkers and cyclists safe.

You have to be a certain height to ride some roller coasters, because the rides aren't built to be safe for every body type. You'll only be kept safe by the bar or harness if you're a certain height - you wouldn't want to slip free and fall off the roller coaster!

All cars have to drive on the same side of the road, so people don't crash. Cars have to stop at red lights, so everyone can move around safely. Loud music has to stop at a certain time of night in lots of places, so that people can sleep. These rules all make sense, and we would live in a much more dangerous world if they didn't exist.

Some people make up rules that we know, deep down, aren't fair. Maybe a group of children at school make a den in the playground and go around telling everyone, "No girls allowed", or tell a certain person they can't join in. In some countries across the world, until very recently, there was a rule that women weren't allowed to drive cars. There have been rules all over the world that allow people to treat others differently and unfairly because of the colour of their skin, where in the world they come from, their religious beliefs, and who they love (that is to say, there have been rules that allow people to treat gay people unfairly). Lots of work has been done to change these rules, but it's still a problem in a lot of places in our world.

In the Bible story from Exodus, the King tells everyone there's a new rule. He's a bit worried because he thinks there are too many Israelites. He makes the Israelites work for him as slaves, but he's worried they might get to be too big a group and start taking over. So, the first thing he does is to work them harder and harder. Then, he tells the women who act as midwives for the Hebrew women: when you help the women to give birth, let the baby girls live, but kill the baby boys. That's the new rule they're given. But they know, deep down, that's wrong. They trust in God and they feel in their hearts that God is telling them not to follow it. So they play a little trick. They secretly let all the babies live, and when the King demands to know why they haven't killed any of the boys, they say, 'These Hebrew women, you know? They're just too quick for us. They're so fast - they always have their babies before the midwives even arrive!' The story says that the women get rewarded for this - God sees the good they've been doing and is very pleased. They were very clever, and they found a way to avoid following the cruel new rule.

Sometimes, I think we are called to do something when we see people making unfair rules. Sometimes we just get a feeling inside us that something isn't right, and God can help us to see that. In the book of Romans, it says:

Do not be shaped by this world. Instead be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you. And you will be able to know what is good and pleasing to God and what is perfect.
(Romans 12:2)

That doesn't mean we should ignore the world and just focus on God. It's ok to enjoy being a part of the world, because we were created to live life to the full. What I think this passage means is that, sometimes, we'll come across things that just don't feel right, and that's ok; we can turn to God, who will help us to think differently about it.

We see a similar impulse in today's Gospel reading, don't we? As Peter names Jesus as his Lord, as he recognises that this man Jesus is also – somehow – the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus affirms him. But that affirmation also includes an instruction to engage in the here and now. This isn't just a gospel reading about how important it is to 'know Christ as our Lord and Saviour', it is also a reading about what happens when we come to that realisation. It is about the invitation to build a church, a society, a world, where love reigns – here and now.

Lots of people throughout history have found clever ways of showing that they don't think a rule is right. Rosa Parks is a great example. She was the woman who refused to give up her seat on the bus for a white man – by doing that very simple but extremely brave thing, she was sending the message that she, and other people of colour, deserve to have the same rights as white people. Black Lives Matter protesters all over the world are using their voices today to tell people in charge that people of colour are still not being treated fairly.

Greta Thunberg is a name you might have heard quite often. She started the 'School Strike for Climate' movement where she encouraged school children all over the world to take a Friday off school as a protest for more action on climate change. She wants to make sure kids her age and younger actually have a world to live in when they are adults, and wants the people in power now to do their bit to save the planet for their grandchildren. She broke the rules that say that every child needs to be in school every single day to send a message that she is serious about wanting change. If you think there is a rule that is unfair, you can sign a petition or write a letter to your member of Parliament. If it's a problem at school, or in your job, you can talk to your teacher or manager to say that things aren't fair.

There are lots of things we can do, and the passage from Romans continues to say:

Each one of us has a body, and that body has many parts. These parts all have different uses. We all have different gifts. Each gift came because of the grace that God gave us. If one has the gift of prophecy, they should use that gift with the faith they have. If one has the gift of serving, they should serve. If one has the gift of teaching, they should teach. If one has the gift of encouraging others, they should encourage. If one has the gift of giving to others, they should give freely. If one has the gift of being a leader, they should try hard when they lead. If one has the gift of showing kindness to others, that person should do so with joy.

For me, that means that we don't all have to do the same things. We all have ways we can make a difference. Some of us are teachers. Some of us are scientists. Some of us are artists. Some of us are writers, singers, builders or doctors. Whatever our skills, and whatever our gifts, we can use them to make a difference. All of these things give us skills to speak out when a rule is leading to people being treated unfairly.

The one thing we know for sure is that God is with us and, when we speak out for people who deserve more love from others, we know we are doing God's work.³

Hymn:

673 STF – Will you come and follow me? - [YouTube](#)

Prayers of intercession

God of all grace, hear us now, as we join in with people praying all around the world. You know that there is much that is not right with our world, our community, our family and our own lives. You know the things that trouble us, the thoughts that weigh heavy on our hearts.

God of all grace, we hand these thoughts and prayers to you now. You who say 'come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest'.

As we've reflected on Greta Thunberg's story, so we pray for all affected most by the climate crisis and climate injustice – those whose homes, livelihoods and families are at risk of destruction by rising sea-levels, floods or increased storms.

God of all grace, we hand these thoughts and prayers to you now. You who say 'come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest'.

As we have reflected on your invitation to Peter, to become the rock on which your church is built, so may we find our place in your story. May we come to know the calling you have on our lives, the ways we can be an answer to prayer.

God of all grace, we hand these thoughts and prayers to you now. You who say 'come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest'.

Come amongst us, by your Spirit.
Amen.

³ All Age Talk written by Emma Dobson

Blessing

Lord of all hopefulness,
Lord of all joy,
Lord of all we have and are,
Inspire us by your Spirit to be a part of your mission.

Amen.⁴

⁴ Additional prayers by Tim Baker