

St Thomas Methodist Church, Exeter

September 2026

Weekly Worship Resources

Prayer of Thanksgiving

from: All We Can Harvest resources 2026

Generous God,

We give thanks and praise for your abundant provision and your constant care for us for our own lives, for our neighbours near and far, and for the communities supported by All We Can's local partners. The Lord is good; His love endures forever.

God of justice and joy,

We are filled with awe at the work of your hands and we marvel at the beauty of your creation. The Lord is good; His love endures forever.

Loving God,

You comfort the broken-hearted and bring healing to the weary; you shine light into our darkness and remain our unfailing hope. The Lord is good; His love endures forever. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

from: All We Can Harvest resources 2026

Lord, Your river begins at the temple. We pray for our own church family, asking that you begin your good work in us once again. Use us to bring good news to others. Show us the people and places you are calling us to bring joy, hope, and encouragement. Help us to keep stepping into your river of life, deepening our trust as we follow you. We look to you, O God. Lead us into the river of life.

Lord, where there are barriers and obstacles standing in the way of others, give us eyes to see and hearts willing to act. Strengthen us as

we seek to stand alongside our brothers and sisters around the world, joining in your work of justice and compassion. Guide our steps and make our path clear.

We look to you, O God. Lead us into the river of life.

Lord, we thank you for your generosity and provision. As we notice the fruit growing in our own lives, continue to nurture what you have planted within us and within our wider community. We pray for Pikin-to-Pikin in Sierra Leone, that their work may flourish, and that their partnership with All We Can may continue to sow a lasting harvest of hope.

We look to you, O God. Lead us into the river of life.

Lord, we have taken steps into your river of abundance today. We hold before you all who are struggling, those who are grieving, those who feel weak or weary, those who are prevented from living the full and flourishing life you desire for them. Comfort the broken-hearted, strengthen the weak, lift up the downtrodden, and raise up a fellowship of believers committed to sharing your love with all.

We look to you, O God. Lead us into the river of life. Amen

06 September – Get ready for God

God gives Moses specific instructions for the Israelites to prepare for the first Passover, protecting them from the plague that will kill every firstborn in Egypt. This is a day that they will remember and celebrate, forever.

The Israelites had to get ready for God to pass over Egypt and for the escape they were about to make. Today, we explore what it means to get ready for God to move in our lives.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 18 Year A

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13.8-14; Matthew 18.15-20

The First Passover Instituted

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

Thought for the week: Journeying to resolution

Today's passages offer perspectives on how to deal with cycles of conflict. The Israelites have lived under slavery in Egypt and are longing to be set free. But all Moses' attempts to persuade Pharaoh to release them are unsuccessful, and we are told that Pharaoh 'hardened his heart' against them. The plagues represent increasingly

strong consequences to this unjust treatment. We might feel uncomfortable with the idea that God had to use violence, even as a last resort. What kind of God suggests the death of all firstborn sons? One answer is that this is the kind of God who liberates slaves and oppressed people. This Passover story is retold each year in Jewish households as a reminder of their liberation from slavery and the journey that followed to God's Promised Land. Liberation theologians from oppressed communities around the world have highlighted how God asks us to be ready for justice and offers freedom from whatever imprisons us.

The Gospel passage picks up this theme of breaking the cycle of conflict. Church leaders have sometimes used it to protect church reputations and avoid wider justice, for example, by dealing with cases of abuse within the church rather than seeking appropriate criminal justice. If we read this passage carefully, we see it's actually a process of:

1. local resolution – first trying to resolve conflict between the parties;
2. accountability – explaining grievances in front of witnesses;
3. transparency – reporting to the whole church;
4. value-based risk management – if people refuse to change, separation and transformation.

Notably, Jesus' attitude toward Gentiles was one of inclusion and healing, as seen in the Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10) and the Canaanite woman's daughter (**Matthew 15:21-28**). We might recognise this cycle in schools, for example, where a restorative approach to bullying and conflict involves pupils as well as staff. We can see this in our workplaces, where grievance and disciplinary processes have progressive stages, from local resolution to dismissal. I wonder how well we deal with disagreement with our family, our friends, and here in our church? Is there a space where we can safely talk things through and try to find common ground? Can we get expert help, such as mediation, when we need it?

We'll always have to deal with unexpected and challenging things in life. In the Exodus passage, God gives clear instructions to the Israelites about how to be prepared for the journey ahead. They have to get ready in a hurry, and there isn't time for more than the basics – so we'll see as we read more of the Exodus story over the next weeks that things didn't always go as planned. There were squabbles and challenges ahead, but, for now, they were safe.

Jesus provides guidance for how Christians can be prepared to deal with the challenges and disagreements. Following God doesn't mean that all our faults and problems just disappear and life is perfect. Rather, we are equipped to work through life's challenges together and, given the chance to put things right, balancing both justice and mercy. Are we ready for God to move in our lives – bringing freedom and restoration in difficult situations? How might we be prepared to welcome God into those situations and be prepared to be led by God if and when those situations arise?



A prayer of adoration and praise

God of the present and of the past, for all that you have done in the lives of your people, we praise you.

For all the ways you invite us to follow and serve you, we praise you.

For the continuity of faith through the ages, we praise you.

Reading your Word, remembering your faithfulness, following your

precepts, together as your people, we praise you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

13 September – Go with God

Having been permitted by Pharaoh to leave Egypt and led by God to the edge of the Red Sea, the Israelites are then pursued by the Egyptian army. Miraculously, God parts the water, enabling the Israelites to cross safely, and the Egyptian army is wiped out by the returning waters – a display of God’s power and faithfulness.

Today’s passages help us consider how we trust God’s leading, even when it seems things aren’t going to plan.

Bible readings for RCL Proper 19 Year A

Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 114; Romans 14.1-12; Matthew 18.21-35

Exodus 14:19-31 [NRSVA]

¹⁹The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. ²⁰It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

²¹Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²²The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.’

The Pursuers Drowned

²⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.’ ²⁷So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

³⁰Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.



Thought for the week: Courageous faith

Living in slavery isn't something any of us would choose, and it's not just an issue of the ancient world – nearly 50 million people are living in modern slavery today. Trafficking, debt bondage, child labour, forced marriage, violence and abuse – the harms of slavery haven't changed. So perhaps we can imagine how desperate the Israelites were to escape from Egypt, even though it was a risky thing to do. Leaving in a hurry, carrying a few possessions, being chased by armed Egyptians with horses and chariots must have been terrifying. Indeed, we are told that the Israelites were so afraid they told Moses it would be better to be back in slavery in Egypt than to die in the desert. Even when reassured that God went with them, facing the Red Sea must have felt like an impossible barrier. But Moses told them to stand firm and to trust and go where God said.

Have you ever seen the sea when a strong wind is blowing? The waves build up and can lead to floods and coastal damage. Even in good weather, natural causeways such as the one to Holy Island in the UK can quickly strand people in life-threatening situations if they misjudge the tide. Perhaps you've seen the TV programmes about coastal rescues and the RNLI. Often the people being rescued must put their trust in their rescuers, even when it feels scary and dangerous to do so. It takes courage to step off a sinking ship, or a rock when you're trapped by the tide, or into a lifeboat tossing about in rough water. Being rescued often doesn't just mean sitting doing nothing. It demands our strength, courage and hope. We must grasp the outstretched hand.

Mike's boat was being driven onto the rocks in a wild storm. His engine wasn't powerful enough to get him out of the harbour into safer open water. The boat was his home, containing everything he owned. But as the waves pushed it onto the rocks, it was clear that he and the boat would be smashed to pieces if he stayed on board. Friends on shore rushed round to the rocky breakwater and formed a human chain. Mike had to take a giant leap off his boat onto the slippery rock and grab a hand before a wave washed him off. It seems almost impossible to do this and not end up hurt on the rocks or

drowned. Miraculously, he managed it, losing his boat and all his possessions, but saving his life.

It's unlikely the Israelites expected the sea to part for them, and often it isn't obvious to us how to get out of difficult or dangerous situations. Maybe you've experienced God 'parting the waters' and leading you into safety, or maybe the barriers still facing you seem impossible to get past. This passage encourages us to have trust and faith and step out with God even when the way ahead is unclear or frightening. Going with God can mean taking that giant leap of faith, and grasping God's outstretched hand.

A prayer of confession

Loving God, forgive us, we pray, when we go against your wishes, when we ignore your presence with us, when we lead others into wrong ways, when we pursue that which is reckless and bad for us. Forgive us, and help us to trust that your light is stronger than our darkness, your creativity stronger than our destructiveness, and your faithfulness stronger than our doubt.

Assurance of forgiveness

God of power and presence, your grace goes ahead of us, drawing us away from the sins that drag us down.

Your forgiveness heals us from all that has drawn us away from you and others.

Your love is in our midst, giving us courage, leading us on and guiding us to your eternal kingdom. Amen

20 September – Enough!

The Israelites have escaped Egypt and are being led by God in the desert. They are hungry and complain against Moses and Aaron, saying they were better off as Pharaoh's slaves. God hears their complaints and provides manna and quail, with specific instructions to ensure everyone has enough, testing the Israelites' trust in God for their survival.

Today's passages demonstrate that God is a generous provider, even if God's provision isn't always in the way we would expect or choose. How can we learn to trust in God for enough and ensure God's provision is shared fairly?

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 20 Year A

Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6,37-45; Philippians 1.21-30; Matthew 20.1-16

Exodus 16:2-15 [NRSVA]

²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.' ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?' ⁸And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.'

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining."' ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. ¹¹The Lord spoke to Moses and said, ¹²'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At

twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.”

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.



Thought for the week: Enough of this!

When is the last time you had a good moan? We can all think of times when we’ve complained, whether over small annoyances, or serious faults. We might complain about things we find unfair in our family, about our consumer rights, or the world in general. In some situations, our right to complain is protected by law; for example, in England and Wales, children have a right to an advocate when they complain about children’s services. This can provide important protection for vulnerable people. Perhaps you think the Israelites were ungrateful; or perhaps that they had plenty to complain about, wandering in the wilderness with not enough to eat or drink. Do you complain more when you’re hungry? It sounds like the Israelites were ‘hangry’ – a term coined by combining the words ‘hungry’ and ‘angry’.

Yet God provided food enough for their needs, which suggests their complaint wasn't dismissed but heard. That's such an important part of making a complaint – that we are listened to and heard, and something changes.

Did you notice that God sent them quail and manna – bread of heaven – enough for their needs, but hardly a feast. Are we content with enough, or are we always looking for more? Research suggests that our brains are hard-wired to complain. In harsh environments, it's a key survival skill to be able to identify what is wrong in a situation, the risks that might put us into danger, and try to fix it. When we're no longer in life-or-death situations, though, this instinct might lead to dissatisfaction or greed. At this time when people celebrate harvest, if we have enough to eat, are we satisfied with that, or do we always expect bigger, better, more? Perhaps we make ourselves unhappy by never being content that we have enough, failing to believe that life is good enough.

Some years ago, Will Bowen started the complaint-free challenge (Will Bowen, *A Complaint Free World: How to Stop Complaining and Start Living the Life you Always Wanted* (Harmony, 2004). The idea was to wear a bracelet on your wrist, and swap arms each time you found yourself complaining. The challenge was to try to go for 21 days without complaining! Will said, 'Complaining is focusing on what we don't want. It's talking about what's wrong, and what we focus our attention on expands'. To be happier, we need to focus more on positive, happy things. Will was not saying that we shouldn't complain about serious injustice or traumatic events. Rather, he suggested that change happens not through complaining but by taking action to make things better. But often our complaints are about more trivial things – a chore we don't like or running out of our favourite chocolate. Can we refocus that negativity into gratitude?

St Ignatius developed a practice called the Examen, in which you reflect at the end of each day on the day's highs and lows, including what you are grateful for. A book about the practice is called *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*. What is the manna, the

‘bread of heaven’ God provides for us, that we are grateful for? Let’s see how gratitude helps us.

A sending out prayer

May God our provider bless us, giving us just what we need.

May God the Son bless us, being our bread of life.

May God the Spirit bless us, fuelling us to bless the world. Amen

27 September – Moses the middleman

The Israelites are journeying in the desert and come to a place with no water. Fearing death, they complain against Moses, questioning whether they should have stayed in Egypt. Moses asks God for help, and God provides a miraculous supply of water from a rock – showing God’s presence and provision.

Moses had a difficult role as an intercessor, advocating between the Israelites and God. How might we also be those who point to God’s goodness and help those around us encounter God?

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 21 Year A

Exodus 17.1-7; Psalm 78:1-4,12-16; Philipians 2.1-13; Matthew 21.23-32

Exodus 17.1-7 [NRSVA]

Water from the Rock

17 From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?’ ³But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?’ ⁴So Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.’ ⁵The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go on ahead of

the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.’ Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’



Thought for the week: Finding our voice

Over the last few weeks we’ve seen how, on the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, Moses often acts as an advocate between the Israelites and God. They complain to him – ‘we’re hungry,’ ‘we’re thirsty,’ ‘we’re going to die here’ – and he, in turn, speaks with God. Sometimes he seems to be turning to God in exasperation – what am I to do with these ungrateful people? But the result each time is that God hears the concerns of the people and responds by meeting their needs. Moses has successfully advocated on their behalf.

The word ‘advocate’ means ‘to voice’ or to plead on someone else’s behalf. Vulnerable people, such as children in care or adults who lack capacity, often have advocates to make sure they’re being cared for and listened to. Lynn was an advocate for young people for many

years. Anna, Linda and Veronica were sisters who were taken into care when they were all under 10 years of age. They formed a good bond with their foster carers, but, as they grew older, the house was too small because they were sharing a bedroom. The social worker formed a plan to send Anna and Linda to new families. The sisters were distraught at the idea of being split up. Lynn supported them to advocate to be kept together, going right through the complaints process to judicial review. In the end, they were successful, and the local authority helped the foster carers to convert the house so they could all stay together.

The Israelites in the wilderness were scared that they wouldn't survive, and it must have been equally terrifying for the sisters to face their only family being torn apart. How daunting it is to speak to those in power when we're scared of the outcomes or feel we are too weak to change things?

In today's reading, it's more the case that Moses needs to remind the people to listen to God! Are we able to be honest with God? Do we listen to what God has to say? It's reassuring that God always looked after the Israelites, however much they grumbled! Can we think of people who need us to advocate for them?

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

God of the past and the present, we bow in awe and gratitude before you.

When we complain, you don't condemn, but confer on us fresh blessings.

When our lives hit rocky places, you bring freshness and hope.

When we feel your absence, you surprise us with your living presence, through the power of your Word, through the witness of your prophets and through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

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