

24th August, 2025

The paper-version Service



St Andrew's
Church



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks
Responding to God's Love



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn:

O perfect love, o perfect sacrifice,
Fountain of life poured out for me.
What heights and depths of
heaven's mercy,
The faithfulness that I believe.
And to whom shall I run?
And in whom shall I hide?
Only You hold the truth I desire.
O perfect love, my prayer shall ever
be
To be found in Jesus.

O perfect love, O perfect mystery,
You were condemned, but I go free.
What truth to know that I can rest
upon:
Your perfect love has covered me.
And what can this heart know?

And what can this heart tell?
But of grace that has rescued me.
O perfect love,
My prayer shall ever be
To be found in Jesus.

O perfect love, forever I shall sing
Of heaven's gates flung wide for
me.
Where fear of death and tears of
hopelessness
Are swallowed up in victory.
And what praise shall be sung
Still to the Holy One;
To the Saviour, Redeemer and King.
O perfect love,
My song will ever be:
'I am found in Jesus.'

The Sermon by Martin Beckwith

Read Psalm 102 and Luke 18:35-43 – Hear my Prayer

This is a psalm of affliction. Of someone of faith who is suffering for no apparent reason. It's a common theme. In the Bible whole books are devoted to anguish - Job, who lost his wealth, health and family on the same day; The Lamentations of Jeremiah; many passages in the OT prophets, and several other psalms. Elsewhere we also talk about "Greek tragedies" and "Norse Sagas". Shakespeare wondered whether it's worth suffering the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". What's the point of it all? Why do we bother? Is the world just a stage, people merely players with their entrances and exits, who play their part then "mere oblivion"? In music we have Dido's Lament, Faure's Requiem, Elgar's Nimrod. The Beatles thought all their troubles "look as though they're here to stay". No doubt you'll have your own example.

We prefer our services to be upbeat, not anguished. That's perfectly correct because the good news of the gospel is upbeat. Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. But we cannot just ignore the anguish of so many. There are people in Four Marks for whom the sentiments of verses 3-11 are meat and drink. Obviously if life isn't miserable, which I hope is the case, we ought to be frequently, gratefully, prayerfully thankful for the fact.

Verses 3-11 brilliantly describe the consequences on individuals suffering Shakespeare's "whips and scorns of time". Where people experience oppression, rejection, fear and disaster. Where one human being will oppress another just because they can, and where death is a reality that brings everything to an end.

I hope this passage brings comfort to those who are living in anguish, regret and lament, maybe in constant fear, who experience oppression. Because, if life is run purely on our own ability, conscience and common sense, that's as far as we go because to go further means considering v12 and the rest of the psalm, "But you Lord"... The psalmist brings God into it. And instantly the horizon lifts and shifts. There's something bigger than us and our experience and comprehension. We're no longer trudging through the sinking sand but standing on the solid rock of Jesus' life and teaching. It puts us into an eternal

context. It's a call to keep perspective and rooted when things go wrong. These poetic and wisdom contrast the ephemeral with the eternal; the temporary with the permanent. To remember what's ultimately important and be aware of God's presence in everyday life – not bound by our definition of time and space. "Compassion, favour, respond, hear, release, remain, established" are words used here to remind us of what salvation does now and will eventually look like.

Nowadays we have a whole NT which carefully explains the steps to the ultimate revelation of God's grace in the work of Jesus, and the guarantee of the HS's presence with us right now. That presence expands to fill the full volume of our anguish and affliction. Paul was told, in 2 Corinthians, "my grace is sufficient for you and my power made perfect in weakness". The affliction is still present, but it's embraced, enfolded, by something bigger.

We've all had our share of problems and sleepless nights, but I've no right to talk about affliction to, for example, a sub postmaster, or to a person infected with Factor 8, or someone whose life is turned upside down by a messy divorce, unemployment, or a medical diagnosis. I cannot begin to understand what they are going through. Nor, I hope, can you, though I know several can. But we do have the right and ability to introduce Jesus and, possibly act as a mouthpiece and example for truth and justice. That's not easy in a world of compromised standards where we can be subtly affected by the worldview and moral standards of the peer group around us. That's why we build our foundations of life on the solid rock, "hearing these words of mine (Jesus) and putting them into practice". In doing so, we reflect God's grace. And we show those facing affliction and unfairness that God is there with them if they want and the Church is too. All our activities may be part of how redemption is announced to those who need it, and provide a relief from the worldly reality which is unjust for so many. The deliverance from affliction may not look like what we expect. Jesus does not promise success or health. But Jesus does promise his followers to be with them every day (Matthew 28:20) and promise that deliverance will ultimately come (2 Corinthians 4:17).

10th Sunday after Trinity: *Let your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, St Andrews and The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

At the Church of the Good Shepherd

- Tea and Chat and Bowls: September 17th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: August 27th and September 24th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

For Further information:

This paper and all parish details are on the website at
<https://www.parishofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>