

# 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2024

## The paper-version Service



**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.



The Good  
Shepherd  
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

**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.**

### **Song:**

Be Dear Lord and Father of  
mankind,  
forgive our foolish ways;  
re clothe us in our rightful mind,  
in purer lives thy service find,  
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who  
heard  
beside the Syrian sea  
the gracious calling of the Lord,  
let us, like them, without a word  
rise up and follow thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee,  
O calm of hills above,  
where Jesus knelt to share with  
thee

the silence of eternity,  
interpreted by love!

Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
till all our strivings cease;  
take from our souls the strain and  
stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess  
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our  
desire  
thy coolness and thy balm;  
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
speak through the earthquake,  
wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm!

## **The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright**

### **Read Nehemiah 4:1-15 and Luke 20:1-8 – Opposition**

We continue with our Nehemiah series, and the introductions from the previous weeks give us the context.

Today, looking at the whole of chapter 4, we begin by recognising that opposition and difficulties are a normal part of the Christian life. Read John 15:18-20, John 16:33, and 2 Timothy 3:12-13.

Sanballat, and his friends didn't want Jerusalem's walls up. They didn't want these people finding their identity, having a voice or power to influence society. They didn't want these people to start ruling their own lives, with their religious ideas. They wanted to control them and keep them in their place which was down there whilst they ruled up here.

Satan doesn't want God's people to find and know their identity, he and his minions do not want God's people to prosper and be able to influence the world for good. Read Ephesians 6:12.

So the enemies ridicule the 'feeble people' and their 'feeble walls.' And for a while, the people keep building to the halfway point – but then, the enemies resort to physical threats. See 4:8 & 11.

And there was a panic through the people – see 4:10. They're half way through the project. Their enthusiasm is flagging. There seems such a long way to go, and it's harder than first thought. There might be times when we feel like giving up. Can I ever beat this temptation? Will I ever see so and so become a Christian? Will we ever see the church full again? Will we see the Kingdom of God, his values, in our society? Will we ever see peace in the world?

So, what does Nehemiah do, and what are we to do?

Firstly, Nehemiah prays.

He responds to God before the responding to the opposition. The devil doesn't want to drive us to God, but doubts, fears, temptations and struggles should take us to God first! Nehemiah, and so should we, recognises that the enemies offence is against God and his plans, and takes God's authority over the problem. Psalm 127 reminds us that unless the Lord builds the house it will fail. The 'house' is the Lords, let's start with him.

Nehemiah prays a condemnatory prayer (4:4-5). Jesus offers a better way in Mathew 5, love your enemies, pray for them. Read Romans 12:14-21 – can we pray for this? Yes, and it produces a good fruit!

Secondly, Nehemiah acts.

As Roy said last week, none, or few of the people were builders by trade, but even fewer were soldiers! However all were called to join in with the sacrifice, including some who'd come from outside the city to help, who then stayed in the city at night to protect it.

Nehemiah organised people to build near, and protect the area near, their own homes. Our action in response to opposition often needs to start by reassuring and being reassured by our home, our family, including our church family. We act within the passions, the vision God has given us – so build and defend where your passion and vision is.

Nehemiah's plan included reinforcing the weak areas (see 4:13). Guards are stationed and people appointed. (We're seeking a new Youth and Children's minister because this is an area we need to strengthen!)

Nehemiah has everyone armed, himself included. Once again all are involved. We can all be involved, we can pray and we can give generously, even sacrificially of our time, skills, our resources, including money.

And the people needed to remove the rubble and rubbish. There may be things in our lives that need removing! Things in our lives that stop the 'walls' of holy life being built? And there may be things we need to add and remember. Read Ephesians 6:10-20.

Thirdly, Nehemiah, and, inspired by him, the people, believe.

The people faced ridicule and violent threats. David faced similar before the giant Goliath, but one with God is a majority. Nehemiah pointed the people to God the deliverer (4:14). Read Isaiah 54:16-17 and Romans 8:31. As one preacher quipped: 'We've seen the end of the story and God wins!' See Revelation 20-22.

***The Second Sunday Before Lent - Sexagesima:*** Almighty God, who alone can bring order to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity: give your people grace so to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, among the many changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; 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, 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).

***The Notices:*** We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat: Feb 21<sup>st</sup> at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: Feb 21<sup>st</sup> at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Feb 28<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: TBA.
- Four Marks & Medstead Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday.
- COGS Tots and Tinytots are on Mondays.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.