

11th 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:

“Man of Sorrows,” what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we,
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full redemption—can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Lifted up was He to die,
“It is finished!” was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high;
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

When He comes, our glorious King,
To His kingdom us to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

The Sermon by Andrew Walters

Read Nehemiah 5:1-13 and Luke 18:18-30 – Justice

These people who are crying out are possibly the grandchildren of the remnants of the Jewish people who avoided the exile to Babylon. They have to pay taxes to King Artaxerxes and provide for the nobles and officials of Jerusalem. God has exposed those who are exploiting and practicing injustice. This is a 450 BC Post Office scandal.

The Old Testament exposes the human condition, our need for knowing God and not having the heart to recognise our need and our biggest problem being our desire to accumulate for themselves. These nobles and officials are very likely to be those we read about in chapter three verse five who are happy to watch Shallum and his daughters put their shoulder to the work on the walls (chapter three verse twelve).

Nehemiah is clearly outraged as he pondered it in his mind. We know from this book Nehemiah is; prayerful and God-fearing with a heart full of God. Quoting from Ezekiel (chapter 36:26) “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you, I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh”.

The exposure of these men has shamed them. They feel guilty. God has placed a consciousness in every human being. It is an example of his existence. Animals on the other hand: if you put your head between the bars of the zoo the lion will not be up in front of the magistrate if he helps himself to it for lunch.

Nehemiah asked (verse 9) should you not walk in fear of your God. A quote from proverbs 7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction”

I believe Zerubbabel who rebuilt the altar (see Ezra 3:2) and Ezra who rebuilt the temple (Ezra 6:14). It seems to me that they thought that God would arrive in all His glory (Leviticus 9:24). Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offerings on the Altar. When the people saw it they shouted for joy and fell face down.

They hope that God would return to Jerusalem and that they would return to their past glory before the exile. But the people had not restored their heart, We can see this in the way these nobles and officials have conducted and behaved in this way.

I see what Nehemiah and his friends were trying to achieve but actually I believe it was God’s will for them to prepare Jerusalem for the first coming of Jesus. God will make his will done through us, even if sometimes it’s not clear to us.

The oath and the shaking of his clothes in front of the priest (verse 12) is a social contract Nehemiah has been given examples of by following the laws of Moses by sacrifices for their atonement. It is Jesus that we all need, rich, poor, oppressors and the aggrieved. We read in Luke 8:25 “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than a rich man to go to heaven”. Peter asks in verse 28, “We have left all we have to follow you.”

In order to get your camel through the small eye of a needle you have to relieve it of its load. You have to get the camel down and to crawl on its knees and push and squeeze through, causing it pain and discomfort, all of which is not easy. We have the chance to call and come to Christ in the same way, humble, low and obedient. He will free us from our burdens, maybe burdens of growing old, or supporting the aged, the poor or neuro-challenged – however that looks with mental health or conditions. And for all our burdens that we have done where shame can live.

After coming through this we have the chance to repack and get rid of stuff all together. We must be prayerful and obedient as Nehemiah showed us.

Jesus is the ultimate judge. We can pass on the wrongs done to us to Jesus Christ as difficult as it can be, although we may be busy seeking justice in the world, just as the postmasters have been doing. Jesus gives us the chance to have peace in our heart. We can be free to forgive the pain. This is the salvation promised here on earth as in heaven. We can pack our camel with good works, kindness as Nehemiah has done with great integrity as it shows us in chapter 5. But it is in Jesus as it says in Romans 10 verse 9-10 if you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and receive him in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved for it is with your heart that you believe and are justified. Nehemiah and his friends prepared the way with the same faith, obedience and availability to answer the will of God.

This faith in Christ is not blind. Much of science and mathematics point to a creative mind behind the universe. I have a doctor friend whose faith took off when he studied the genetic code; building blocks of life. Science is brilliant at working out how our universe works and everything seems fathomable, but the mind that made it is outside of science and beyond the rules of our universe. For example, science can work out exactly what is in a cake, However, in order to know why it was made, you need to ask the ladies who bake for our Sunday afternoon services. This is true for even the most simplest of organisms.

History, with its rules of probability, proved that Jesus walked, that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus' friends saw the risen Jesus. It was fifteen years ago today that I came to believe. It gives me a similar sense of security as the handrail on my tower scaffold. It has been like being in the sun on a cold winter's day, particularly when you catch the rays when you're in a frost pocket.

Prayer to end:

Thank you Heavenly Father for the faithfulness and example of Nehemiah, we have learnt to make ourselves available for you to equip us, we have learnt to bring our lowest points and weaknesses for you to defend and rebuild and here we have learnt to put our trust in you for trust and forgiveness. Amen.

The Sunday Next Before Lent Quinquagesima: Almighty Father, whose Son was revealed in majesty before he suffered death upon the cross: give us grace to perceive his glory, that we may be strengthened to suffer with him and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory; 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 21st at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: Feb 21st at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Feb 28th 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.