

Sunday 17 May 2020

The paper-version Service



For now, we cannot meet in the building – but the church is still open!

All of our services are on-line www.goodshepherdfourmarks.org.uk but we're producing this weekly sheet which captures our Sunday service for those who can't access the internet.

To Begin: Grab a Bible. If safe, perhaps light a candle. Find a comfortable place 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 modern song from this Sunday's Service set out below.



Opening Prayer: Father God, thank you for your welcome and grace toward us. We come open handed to you, recognising we need your mercy and help. We thank you for your love demonstrated in Jesus and we receive your forgiveness and offer our thanks and worship. As we hear from your word, the Bible, help us to receive your peace and know your joy. Help us, full of your Holy Spirit, to declare your love to the world by our deeds and words, to the glory of your name. Amen

Song:

I see the King of glory, coming on the clouds with fire. The whole earth shakes, the whole earth shakes. I see His love and mercy, washing over all our sin. The people sing, the people sing.

*Hosanna, Hosanna,
Hosanna in the highest*

I see a generation, rising-up to take their place, with selfless faith, with selfless faith. I see a near revival,

stirring as we pray and seek, we're on our knees, we're on our knees.

(Bridge) Heal my heart and make it clean. Open-up my eyes to the things unseen. Show me how to love like You have loved me. Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Everything I am for Your kingdom's cause. As I walk from earth into eternity.

Hosanna...

Read: Ephesians 2:11-22.

Living with the One (a summary of the talk given by David Bush):

So much of what we think comes from the viewpoint we take, from where we stand to view things. And viewpoints are important in our Ephesians passage today.

Paul writes here to the Gentiles, telling them about their adoption and reconciliation to God. But what was the Jewish viewpoint? What was the viewpoint of those, who in a long and troubled history, clung fast to the one true God, held up the true faith, the rules and strictures of the law and commandments, to keep the worship of God pure and holy?

Faith in the one true God was, in Paul's time, becoming open to more and more people who had traditionally been excluded:

- In Acts 8, Philip baptized an Ethiopian eunuch—a man who, because of his physical defect (castration) would have been excluded from Jewish worship and community.
- In Acts 10, Peter saw a vision requiring him to eat animals that were unclean by Jewish law
- And Paul himself, travelled widely on his three missionary journeys seeing more and more Gentiles converted to Christ.

Over a short period, the church membership was shifting from being predominately Jewish to being predominately Gentile. For the Jews, it must have been tempting to reject the change and hold on to the traditional that was solid and sure.

So, also for us, it can be tempting to focus on what is traditional, established, distinctive, what marks us apart, making this the basis of our identity.

But the Jewish people could not hold on to all the rules and practices of the past if the church was to grow.

To return to this Ephesians passage, and this time see it from the view of Gentiles, the viewpoint of most of in Four Marks, and we find that it suggests, that we need to bring some humility to our faith.

Paul says to the Gentiles:

- Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ,
- Remember you were excluded from citizenship in Israel,
- Remember that you were without hope and without God in the world

Over history, we Gentiles, have not been the primary champions that have kept the faith going – that was Israel. We were not the people first chosen to be God's people. Ours was

not the nation which gave birth to, and provided a home for, our Saviour!

A friend of mine recently took up Irish citizenship. At the public ceremony conferring citizenship on the group, there was a speech and the Irish minister speaking said something like, 'Don't feel that by becoming Irish you have to leave behind all your current and existing culture. No. Bring it with you. Help us to grow into the Ireland we need to be in the future by bringing in your history and culture.'

God established Israel to be the first part of his church on earth – see Genesis 12:2-3. But for the blessing to spread, the Jewish traditions and established practices had to change, adapt, grow – even if that was disturbing and uncomfortable to those 'on the inside' at the time.

As adoptees into that religion, it seems to me that modern Christians can do no less than the Jewish worshippers were asked to do by

Paul – we should not be holding so tight to rules, laws and practices that it excludes people from the church – even if that feels uncomfortable and disturbing for the traditional views we have inherited, grown up with or developed.

What about our church – in Four Marks – we seek to offer a welcoming and inclusive family – and being inclusive means changing to include others – as the Jewish people in Ephesians found. I have a suspicion that in these difficult times there are many, many people who are reaching out to God like that Ethiopian eunuch – lets pray that we are not inadvertently or explicitly excluding them from our community because they are different – because they eat different food, because they practice religion differently, because ... well because anything – it's not for us to judge! And if we succeed, God willing, may He give us the grace to adjust to the balance of worshippers – as the Jews did when the Gentile worshippers became predominant.

I think you can see this response in one of two ways. Either church will grow because God will make it so – and we will have to choose to rejoice and join in or be grumpy and become marginalised. Or we will stick to rules and traditions and exclude people – and frustrate the growth God wants to see happen. Where will you be lining up?



Prayers: Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)

- Pray for the day ahead and its tasks
- Pray for the nations
- Pray for organisations
- Pray for individuals, for neighbours, for family and friends
- Pray for the Church



A prayer for all those affected by coronavirus: Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy. Sustain and support the anxious, be with those who care for the sick, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may find comfort knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. 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 for ever. Amen.

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, COGS, 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: If you know of others who'd like to receive this, or you'd rather not receive it; or if you find yourself isolated and not able to get neighbours, friends or family to help, then ring Howard, 01420 563344.

- Next Thursday (Ascension Day) begins Thy Kingdom Come – we will send information about this in the next mailing.
- Daily HOPE is a new initiative of the Church of England.



A free phone line of hymns, reflections and prayers