

# Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## The paper-version Service



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

All of our services are online [www.goodshepherdfourmarks.org.uk](http://www.goodshepherdfourmarks.org.uk) but this weekly sheet captures our Sunday service for those without internet.

***To Begin:*** Find 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:*** God of love, thank you that you welcome us into your family. We are not worthy to be called your children, and we confess our failure to you. Thank you that you forgive us, and that through Jesus you offer us new life and begin to transform us by your Holy Spirit. Help us to respond to you today, become more like you, living to your praise and glory, loving you, loving our neighbour, and inviting others into your love. **Amen**

### ***Song:***

Grace, what have you done?  
Murdered for me on that cross  
Accused in absence of wrong  
My sin washed away in your blood  
Too much to make sense of it all  
I know that your love breaks my fall  
The scandal of grace, you died in my  
place, so my soul will live

*Oh to be like you  
Give all I have just to know you  
Jesus, there's no one besides you  
Forever the hope in my heart*

Death, where is your sting?  
Your power is as dead as my sin  
The cross has taught me to live  
In mercy, my heart now to sing  
The day and its trouble shall come  
I know that your strength is enough  
The scandal of grace, you died in my  
place, so my soul will live

*Oh to be like you  
And it's all because of you, Jesus  
It's all because of you, Jesus  
It's all because of your love  
That my soul will live*

**Read:** Ephesians 6: 1-9

***Living with Integrity*** (a summary of the talk given by Rob Hughes)

This week, as we continue journeying through Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, our emphasis is upon hearing and responding to God's word. Paul's letter reminds me that living life in a world made by God is - at heart - a 'lesson in love'.

To love is to care, to see life's unsurpassable value - all life, every life. Most of us come to that view sooner or later. But it's one more evidently shared because of the pandemic: It is so much easier to see the value of other lives when we see the immediate threat to us.

When fear brings us to recognise the suffering of others, we think more about them, we see their importance. Before we shared the trials of this Corona Virus pandemic, we shared this world - indeed we shared the very image of a caring God. We have always had so much in common. So much more joins than separates us: And maybe we are coming to know one another better despite - or possibly because - of 'social distancing'.

Saint Paul's message here is about the values of love, of caring not just for ourselves, but for the whole of life - life in all its variety and difference. He is writing to people whose living is under constant threat by the Roman Empire. The Ephesus community were good people, like most are. They were

animated by Jesus' example, as we are; they were trying to look after each other. But, living with insecurity, it is hard to keep our personal integrity - for them and for us.

The world is contending with another powerful threat. But this time we can see how it might bring us closer. For a time at least, we are exchanging physical closeness for closeness of another kind. Our public celebrations of care workers on Thursday evenings earlier in lock-down, brought us to hear, sense; almost to 'touch' our mutual need for closeness: Yet aren't there always powers, economic, political, and social, working to separate us from one another? When threatened, there is always a temptation to shunt the common good to one side, to pull up the draw-bridge and escape to a more comfortable private world.

Yet we are so blessed by the life we share, by the lives around us, by the care shown to us by others - by such goodness and compassion. But should that come as a surprise to those who profess our Christian faith? What we are seeing is proof we are born to share the goodness of creation, each made with an immense capacity for good. That's simply become more obvious. Paul would not be surprised because it is clear to him we inherit our goodness from the God who gives us life. He tells us to employ our goodness, put it to use. God's 'rule' is

impartial, he says. There are no favourites. We are equals.

And that means we must live with integrity, honouring one another. In Paul's eyes, God is like a perfect parent, teaching the values of kindness and compassion, wisdom and truth – who expects us to put others before ourselves. On the whole, this is what we have seen others doing - to such good effect. Events have been revealing to us our spiritual nature. And to have looked out upon the love we have seen demonstrated should fill us with renewed hope.

There seems to be public agreement with Paul that everyone wants things to be well with their lives, to live long in contentment. And events are showing this is achievable only when we hold to the common good, when we accept how vital it is to care and to be cared-for.

Those who give their lives in service of others are awakened to something fundamentally good, a spiritual agency at work in their life. It's a voice moving us to act in obedience to a 'universal' justice, authority far beyond ourselves. It's the call of a loving parent to whose unfailing devotion we respond instinctively with trust and gratitude.

Yet God's love comes with no parental pre-conditions. We owe God nothing but to be ourselves. Paul makes that theological point here. He is not giving a lecture on ethics. We carry God's essence of perfect parental love,

though it might lie buried beneath anxiety.

There is nothing new in that. Eight hundred years ago the Persian mystic and poet, Jamil Rumi, famously said: "Yesterday I was clever so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise so have begun to change myself."

In sum, we should not pretend to be what we are not in order to stay on the right side of authority or to keep up appearances. We ought not to try earning acceptance. Instead we should live true to the goodness God has placed within each of us because it is necessary to the well-being of the world. It's of no consequence where we come in the social pecking-order.

Paul is telling us to do the right things, not because we are slaves, not out of duty or fear, but because we know the importance of our lives to God, that our integrity is vital to the wholeness of Creation. Goodness is crucial. The life of the world depends upon it.

So, I say to those who tend to keep accounts, know that in the end, what we give in care comes back in care to us. This is how the real economy works, God's economy.

If at last we can perceive that our real source of security is the divine spark within us, then let us follow the example of God's Son Jesus, and fan into flame his spark in others - for his sake, and to the glory of our perfect Father in heaven. Let us do it for God.

**Prayers:** I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (1 Timothy 2:1-2 NIV)

- 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



**Collect for 5<sup>th</sup> after Trinity:** Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified: hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people, that in their vocation and ministry they may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, 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 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.

The Church is open for those who would like to use the space for private prayer. Clear instructions are displayed on how to make use of the church safely.

We cannot yet meet for services, but we will keep you updated as new information becomes available.

