

# 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2023

## 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.

**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:**

I cast my mind to Calvary  
Where Jesus bled and died for me  
I see His wounds, His hands, His feet  
My Saviour on that cursed tree

His body bound and drenched in tears  
They laid Him down in Joseph's tomb  
The entrance sealed by heavy stone  
Messiah still and all alone

O praise the name of the Lord our God  
O praise His name forevermore  
For endless days we will sing Your  
praise  
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God

And then on the third at break of dawn  
The Son of heaven rose again  
O trampled death where is your sting?  
The angels roar for Christ the King

O praise the name of the Lord our God  
O praise His name forevermore  
For endless days we will sing Your  
praise  
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God

He shall return in robes of white  
The blazing sun shall pierce the night  
And I will rise among the saints  
My gaze transfixed on Jesus' face

O praise the name of the Lord our God  
O praise His name forever more  
For endless days we will sing Your  
praise  
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God.



The Good  
Shepherd  
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

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

**Intro:** Greg Eland spoke last week about our Mission Statement, Growing Deeper in God and Growing Larger in Mission. This week we consider the specifics of 'Prayer, Bible Study, and Fellowship'.

We want to live and we know there are essentials to living! We need to breathe, we need to eat and we need to move, to exercise. In other words we need to be fit. Fit to function and thrive. Without proper breathing, eating and moving, we begin to fail physically and mentally; without prayer, Bible reading, and Christian community, our souls begin to fail, and this will impact our mental and physical well-being too.

Lent is a time of re-assessment, an opportunity to strengthen and re-new disciplines. To take time to exercise and be refreshed. There are more exercises than these three, but these are a

**Prayer:** Now breathing is pretty automatic, and don't try it, but I'm told that if you hold your breath for long enough you'll pass out and your body will automatically begin to breathe again.

Without breath we cannot, function let alone thrive. The Bible often speaks of the Holy Spirit as breath, and I want to take this further in thinking about prayer, which is, in any case enabled by the Holy Spirit. The breath of God, enables our breath of life – prayer.

Praying is communicating with the Almighty God. Let's not lose the wonder and privilege of this. And that we're invited to talk to God as Abba, Daddy, Papa; invited into an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father. All relationships need communication – like all lives need breath.

Our breathing is automatic, but we can do things to help our breathing. Prayer is often automatic. Many cry out, an 'Oh God help' prayer when in crises, but we can do things to deepen our prayer lives!

To improve our breathing we can work on exercises that increase our lung capacity, to improve our prayer lives, we can exercise. What might we try? To mix the metaphors, to deepen a relationship with another, we must spend time in their company. We may even 'do' different things together, from drinking coffee, to playing sport, or visiting places of interest.

To deepen our relationship with God in prayer, we need to spend time.

- Pursue a daily time – a time and place of focus. Jesus took times be alone with his Father.
  - Just start talking and listening! Don't be surprised by distractions, what human conversation follows a straight line? – but use these as prompts for conversation.

- Be alert to the presence of God with you as you sit, walk, and go about your daily activities, and invite him into conversation with you.
- Respond to the moments of your day with thanks for the good things, a beautiful flower or view, a smile from a friend, or stranger.
  - But also with requests for assistance for yourself, or others, as challenges arise, or we hear news of individual or global challenges.
  - And, share emotions, tell God how it feels, allow his company to bring courage, peace, comfort, and joy.

Like any exercise regime, we have to practice – it requires discipline!

**Bible Study:** Eating requires our cooperation, we have actually put food into our stomachs and some illnesses affect this tragically. And we need a good diet to enable us to thrive.

Jesus, during his desert temptation – the inspiration for Lent – quoted Deuteronomy 8:3.

So how are we to read the Bible? For me reading the Bible and prayer go hand in hand. The Bible is God's love letters written to us, his primary means of speaking to us – it is the **Best Instructions Before Leaving Earth!** Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

- Read it daily. Choose a scheme, find an App, use a plan. Ask God to speak, maybe make notes.
- Meditate. Someone once said, 'If you can worry, you can meditate on God's word', because meditating is focussed thinking on one thing.
- Read around, listen to what others have written, or said – the internet has a wealth of information and sermons, but be discerning.

**Fellowship:** Exercise is vital to our thriving, if we don't keep moving, we'll stop being able to move at all. So, being together as the people of God, as community, as family as a body is vital to our growth and well-being.

- The people of God, in the past and today have always recognised that following God is a team game. We need each other and, difficult as this can be, we benefit each other.
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Proverbs 27:17 and Hebrews 11:24-25.
- As much as you are able, if you're reading this at home, or watching online, join us in person and let us grow together.
- Join with others to pray and read the Bible – not mentioned earlier but vital for our prayer life, and Bible understanding. This might be a prayer triplet, a small group, joining with our monthly prayer meetings, or coming on Sundays – but join in and meet with others. Be family.

**Conclusion:** Finally, to invest in one relationship might lead to another being allowed to drift. To get fit, we may need to reduce or cut-out certain foods and check whether we need to stop some exercises that are not helping, or adjust our posture. Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

**Prayers:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:4-6)*



- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, neighbours, and for family & friends.
- Pray for the Church.

**Collect: Second Sunday of Lent.** Almighty God, you show to those who are in error the light of your truth, that they may return to the way of righteousness: grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord 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:** *Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; 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.*

**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 & Bowls: Wed. 15<sup>th</sup> March at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: 22<sup>nd</sup> March at 11am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise for Easter, 3pm Sunday April 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- COGS Tots: 2<sup>nd</sup> Mondays. COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.