

25th 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:

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that
flood,

Lose all their guilty stains:
Lose all their guilty stains,
Lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners, plunged beneath that
flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away:
Wash all my sins away,
Wash all my sins away;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed ones of God
Be saved, to sin no more:

Be saved, to sin no more,
Be saved, to sin no more;
Till all the ransomed ones of God,
Be saved to sin no more.

E'er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die:
And shall be till I die,
And shall be till I die;
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

When this poor lispng, stammering
tongue
Lies silent in the grave,
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save:
I'll sing Thy power to save,
I'll sing Thy power to save;
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save.

The Sermon by Martin Beckwith

Read Nehemiah 8:1-12, Luke 6:20-31 -- Renewal & Joy

The temple, and now the wall, were complete. The temple gave the Jews in Jerusalem a spiritual identity – it's where God dwelt and met with them. The wall gave them a geographic and social identity. Both had been opposed. Satan will stir up opposition wherever God's work is established and certainly where it has an impact in the community.

Now the people had gathered together to hear and understand God's law. They came voluntarily, enthusiastically and attentively – all essential characteristics of profitably bible study and spiritual growth. For many of them it would have been the first time they'd heard it. It must have been similar during the Reformation in Europe, 500 years ago, when people began to read the bible for themselves, in their own language, and understand what it actually said and meant, and the consequences it would have in their lives. Ezra would have read only what we would now call Exodus – Deut. We have the whole of the OT and the NT, with the work of Jesus as the pivotal point.

People can become Christians without knowing any scripture. But it can't stay that way. Paul describes new Christians as "infants in Christ" able to take only 'milk'; the most basic understanding of Christian things, but we'd be concerned if we didn't move onto "solid food", a deeper spiritual understanding of scripture. This is vital because our faith is rooted in scripture. It's the primary source of doctrine. It's all inspired by God and "useful for teaching ... and training in righteousness." Basing our faith on anything or anyone else is shipwreck. Doctrine is our equivalent of what Ezra and his team of assistant clergy read to the people.

Over the centuries Scripture has been interpreted and passed down to us so we understand how its themes fit together. It's like piecing together a jigsaw to form the picture on the box. We fit together the references to the doctrines throughout scripture and see how they build on each other. We had a great example in our readings today. Ezra read the law, then Matthew recorded that Jesus himself said "I've come.... to fulfil [the law] . The words in Handel's Oratorio Messiah is an excellent example of how a jigsaw of pure scripture, taken from all over the OT and the NT, is built into a description of why Jesus came, what he did, and its consequences for each of us.

Sometimes sincere Christians sincerely disagree over what scripture means. We agree on its authority and inspiration, but differ on its interpretation. I'd imagine there were numerous disagreements over where the wall should be built and how each section met up, and what Ezra's reading the law actually

meant. Disagreement is inevitable and is OK provided it's managed according to the principles of scripture rather than our own impulse. Paul often wrote to people he disagreed with, "grace and peace to you from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ". We're all brought into peace with God, and fellowship with each other solely through God's grace, and the work of the same Lord Jesus. That puts our earthly disagreement into perspective.

Then we apply our faith to whatever situation we find ourselves. We live it out. We all have our own ideas how best to do this. Whatever the subject, we must not allow ourselves to become spiritually divided by disagreement on tactics.

But so what? What's the point? With Ezra, hearing and understanding God's law caused the people a deep sadness at the realisation of how far their nation had fallen short of God's standard, and therefore why they were suffering the consequences of sin which God cannot tolerate then, as now. There's a place for weeping when we look at our own lives, and the world around us and compare it with what God expects. That's often the 1st step in becoming a Christian.

But Ezra didn't let that last. Understanding God's law was a cause of great joy, satisfaction and contentment. Knowing what God has done for us- our heritage and inheritance in Jesus - always is. We can see further than Ezra: we know the death and resurrection of Jesus provided a permanent solution to the separation of sin. Jesus is the fulfilment of the law Ezra was reading. He paid the penalty for sin permanently, and now he will live within the life of anyone who's asked him to share it with them. We confirm it every week in song or liturgy. The words are full of the joy and thankfulness of knowing Jesus. It's a base of contentment which is our strength, inwardly and externally. Individually and collectively. It should be what we're known for, a COGS characteristic. It won't change what's in the diary or what's worrying us, but it will alter how we handle it. It will put a new perspective on how we view the news, and to life and death and what happens afterwards.

So, with the Holy Spirit and the risen Jesus in our lives we get on with the routine stuff of life, building our part of the wall, until Jesus says 'that's enough, well done'.

The 2nd 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: *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: March 20th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: March 20th at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Feb 28th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: Sunday March 24th at 3.00pm.
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.
- COGS Tots and Tinytots are on Mondays.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.