

# 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 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:**

To God be the glory, great things he has done!

So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,

who yielded his life an atonement for sin,

and opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord,

Let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!

O come to the Father through Jesus the Son

and give him the glory, great things he has done!



The Good Shepherd  
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,

and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son,

but purer and higher and greater will be

our joy and our wonder, when Jesus we see.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord,

Let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!

O come to the Father through Jesus the Son

and give him the glory, great things he has done!

## The Sermon by Timothy James

### God is Near. Read Psalm 75, John 1:1-14

This is the first in a new summer series on Great Psalms. Howard has entitled it “**God is Near**” (v.1).

I didn’t understand until recently how much more than songs of praise the Psalms are, and particularly their **prophetic** function. The key to understanding this psalm is to understand the prophetic vision which lies behind it. The poet (Asaph) is capable of seeing ultimate reality and presenting it as current reality.

The background to the psalm is a problem which never goes away: when will there be justice? This problem threatens our trust in him, and casts into doubt the moral balance of the universe (v.3a).

That is why this is a psalm about God as judge; and also why it can be a psalm of **praise**.

Look how it begins and ends with praise (vv.1, 9). Asaph says that he praises God because he is near, because he has done wonderful things.

Then he puts in God’s mouth the reason he can praise him. At “the appointed time” (v.2) God will judge the world with equity. This will involve breaking the power of “the arrogant” (v.4) and “the wicked” (v.8). This was the dream of God’s people under oppression for centuries – it lies behind **Mary’s words of praise** in the Magnificat (**Luke 1: 46-55**).

But this raises as many questions as it answers. How will God do justice? What form will his judgment take? And, most urgently, **when** will the appointed time come?

The thing about the problem of God’s apparent waiting, of his patience with the wicked, is that it is too real and too morally troubling to go away with a reassuring pat on the head. “Never mind, it will all be alright in the end” is never going to cut it as an answer when we look at our world in which arrogant people get away with wicked deeds all the time.

The Bible deals with this problem in many places and in many ways. Other Psalms (e.g. **Ps.73**) take it up again. **Isaiah 59** is a sustained wrestling with the lack of real justice in society and a recognition that God’s direct intervention is needed. The lectionary gospel reading for today is the parable of the weeds from **Matthew 13**. When an enemy plants weeds among the landowner’s good crop, his servants want to go in and tear them up, but their master tells them to wait until the harvest, when the crop and the weeds can be gathered and dealt with separately and appropriately. In an unusually detailed explanation of the parable, Jesus says that the harvest is “the end of the age” (Mt.13:39, 40).

This parable, too, is prophetic, like Mary’s song of praise and like the psalm we are studying. As we read the Bible, we should look for these prophetic words, these promises, even in the passages which do not begin “thus says the Lord”.

So Asaph gives thanks that God will intervene to judge with equity at an appointed time (v.2). But the question remains: **when?**

The answer is contained in our gospel reading from **Mark 1**. The ringing words with which Jesus announces his mission are:

“The **time** has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has **come near**. Repent and believe the good news!” (v.15).

What is “come near”? Does it mean “is approaching and will arrive soon”? No, it means “it’s here!” (“the train now standing at Platform 7”). The kingdom has arrived, in the person of its king. The decisive intervention has taken place. The judgment is in progress.

The reason for God’s apparent delay in judging the wicked is not weakness, or indifference; it is mercy. But the judgment has begun.

It is easy for us to look **forward** for God’s decisive intervention, as Asaph does on v.2. But we **already** live in the post-resurrection/ascension age – the decisive intervention of God in judgment has taken place: it took place when Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom, as is testified in all four Gospels. The process is not complete – “We wait the consummation of peace for evermore”, as the hymn says – but the breakthrough has been made.

What should be our response?

First, we should respond in praise, as Asaph did. He wanted to declare God’s wonderful deeds. He saw the moral balance of the universe as constantly upheld by God’s equitable judgments.

Then, we need to look around us for the consequences of God’s intervention. What can we see which shows that he has come, in mercy for those who he lifts up and in judgment on the wicked and arrogant? It may not be complete, but it has started, and we need to recognise it for what it is. We need to be able to see the arrogant for what they truly are. Reading the Psalms is a good way to do this: they are full of the imminent judgment of the wicked and vindication of God’s people.

Thirdly, we need to live with the tension of the age we live in – the age which comes after God’s intervention, but before it is all completed and cleared up. We need to be content with our position, and wait patiently for the completion of the kingdom. This will be easier if we can really understand what is going on. Children can be impatient because we do not fully explain to them what is going on, why they have to wait and what is coming. God has not left us like that – his word explains to us exactly what is going on.

Finally, we must work to be more like him. If he is the just judge, how can we work to bring his justice in our communities, in continuation and fulfilment of the work of his Son?

**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: Seventh Sunday after Trinity:** Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of your great mercy keep us in the same; 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.**

**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 & Bowls: Wed.16<sup>th</sup> August at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: 26<sup>th</sup> July & 23<sup>rd</sup> August at 11am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise TBA.
- COGS Tots: 2<sup>nd</sup> Mondays.
- COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.