

# 6th February, 2022

## The paper-version Service



The Good  
Shepherd  
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

**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 set out below.



**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:

Faithful one, so unchanging  
Ageless one, You're my rock of peace  
Lord of all I depend on You  
I call out to You, again and again  
I call out to You, again and again

*You are my rock in times of trouble  
You lift me up when I fall down  
All through the storm, Your love is  
the anchor, my hope is in You alone*

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The Lord is my shepherd  
He leads me on  
Beside the still waters  
He restores my soul  
Though I walk through the valleys,  
I will not fear  
I know You are with me,  
I feel You here

The Lord is my shepherd  
Through darkest night  
Though evil surrounds me  
You defend my life  
Goodness and mercy  
for all my days  
In the house of my God  
my heart will stay

*I am safe in Your arms, in Your arms*

*I am safe in Your arms, in Your arms*

**Read Hebrews 11: 23-39, Luke 8: 16-18**

## **The sermon given by Rev. Howard Wright: Live by Faith.**

We are continuing our Faith series. In our high anxiety society, we can live with confidence and assurance in the power and love of God and of his good future for us. 'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.' (Hebrews 11:1) and 'Fear is letting your circumstances come between you and God. Faith is letting God get between you and your circumstances.'

This week we learn from more heroes of faith, who hopefully inspire us to be heroes of faith ourselves.

These heroes 'loved' God and longed for his presence – recognising that it was found in the heavenly country. They wanted God and his presence more than possessions, approval, recognition – Read 11:24-27 again.

God wasn't just a lifestyle choice – like some are vegans, others are Christians – they believed it because it was true in the person of God and how much more is it 'true' for us in the person of Christ.

To follow Christ is to pursue the person, to love Christ, and to live in obedience to his truth. The ancients' faith was seen as they lived in pursuit of, and in obedience to, the call of God. Moses pursues the invisible God by faith, demonstrated in obedience, and is called a friend by God.

Without the hope of the Heaven, people pursue paradise entirely on earth. It must be here somewhere and surely, we can achieve it, if we pull together. This is the same false hope that built the tower of Babel (See Genesis 11:1-9). And it the cry of our age, and a clear call during the pandemic – if we work hard enough, we can fix this. We seek a messiah: as children we look to our parents or other significant people, such as teachers. As adults we look to science, politicians, or we escape, avoiding the questions, occupying our time with hobbies, TV, relationships, or dulling our senses with drink or drugs or internet misuse.

The world is broken and will not be fixed by any human agent alone – it needs its creator's loving touch, which is activated in our lives by faith, believing in God, turning toward him, (repentance) and taking him at his word.

Living by faith does not mean we are suddenly perfect – only one was ever good, and he is the Messiah! The list of ancients includes murderers, cowards,

adulterers, and a significant number of other failures! But what they have in common is a belief in God, constantly returning to him, honest about their weaknesses, acknowledging their failures they continue to pursue relationship with God as the greatest prize. And as a consequence: read 11:33-35.

Notice how their 'weakness was turned to strength'. Is this how it feels for us? Can God do such a thing for us? The Lord says to Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' (2 Corinthians 12:8).

Where are your weaknesses? Jacob was deceitful, Joseph was boastful, Moses had an anger problem and it resulted in murder, Samson had a lust issue, which despite his great strength caused his downfall, Gideon felt inferior, Jephthah made rash commitments which caused his daughter's death, David lazily shirked his responsibilities and by being in the wrong place, and looking in the wrong direction, fell into adultery.

Yet, they looked to God, believed in him, turned back to him, received his love and forgiveness, and pursued his glory once again.

Pursuing God was, and is, not easy: read 11:35-38. But see how Paul encourages the Philippians and us: Read Philippians 3:7-14.

The heroes of faith constantly looked forward. There was much for them to look back to, regrets, stuff left behind. But Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. So they looked forward and even as they saw their lives ebb away and age take them, they believed God called them forward – always called forward to the new city and glory in the presence of Jesus.

Abraham never had a country on earth as his own. Many died as seeming failures, in poverty, loneliness, or overtaken by oppressive regimes but none of this is wasted, just as the awfulness of Good Friday is not wasted but transformed, so God takes our meagre offerings and even our failures and makes them his successes.

As we asked before. Will you trust him for your health and aging? (Failures) Will you trust him for your education, career, health and future, for your finances and housing, for your food and clothes, for our nation and world – for the pandemic? This does not necessarily mean living recklessly, though it might (!), but living with confidence in the God who loves and gave himself for us. Read: Hebrews 11:39-12:2. Then pray for faith and live by it!

**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, for neighbours, for family and friends.
- Pray for the Church.

**Collect: Fifth Sunday after Epiphany:** O LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy Church and household continually in thy true religion; that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power; through Jesus Christ 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 forever. **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:** 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: 16<sup>th</sup> February at 2pm, Church Hall.
- Coffee & Questions: 23<sup>rd</sup> February at 11am, Church Hall.
- COGS Tots: 8<sup>th</sup> February.
- Messy Church: 13<sup>th</sup> February.
- Prayer Meeting in Church, 7.30pm on 23<sup>rd</sup> February