

# Sunday 26<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:**

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise, the city of our God, the holy place, the joy of the whole Earth.

Great is the Lord in whom we have the victory, he aids us against the enemy, we bow down on our knees.

**Read:** Psalm 48

**Forever** (A summary of the talk given by Val Lucas).

Researching Psalm 48, I realised once again, how clever the bible is. Take the number 48: in Hebrew, the number 48

*And Lord, we want to lift your name on high, and Lord, we want to thank you, for the works you've done in our lives;*

*And Lord, we trust in your unfailing love, for you alone are God eternal, throughout Earth and Heaven above.*

is the numerical value of the word Zion. Also, in Hebrew the first and last sections of the psalm are 24 words in length, adding up to 48 words. It is no coincidence that the psalmist thought the citadel of Zion, the city of God, an

important place to explore. Psalm 48 therefore must contain an important message for us. Let us explore this message.

Zion can refer to one of three places: the hill where the most ancient areas of Jerusalem stood; the city of Jerusalem itself; or the dwelling place of God. In the book of Isaiah and in the Psalms, Zion refers to the city. Zion is a citadel, a stronghold. In times of trouble the community would run inside and be safe from their enemies. History tells us that people lived near citadels for security and protection.

Thinking about what it must be like living in Zion, my thoughts to our village. Although Four Marks does not have a castle or walls, it somehow feels a safe place to live. Throughout the pandemic, friends and neighbours have been saying how blessed they are living where we have fields and lanes to walk in, and houses with gardens. Compared to the many urban areas, our community feels a place of relative safety and Covid-19 data bears this out. The people of Zion and of Four Marks have one thing in common; they can put their trust and security in the place where they live.

However, Psalm 48 tells us that it is not right to do this. It is not the fortress or clean air that we should be put our trust in, but God. When the people put their trust in God and not a place, the enemy is crushed. The kings who invaded Zion did not flee

because of thick walls and strong towers, but because they could see God's presence in the place (see verse 4-6).

Jerusalem did fall to the Babylonians because the glory of God left the temple (Ezekiel 10). They had rejected God and so he removed his protection - not even the thick walls of the citadel could keep them safe.

Psalm 48 urges us to put our trust in God. Sometimes, it is hard to put this in action. Our security is found in many things, our houses, money, job, health, relationships. The pandemic has put many of these things we hold tightly to the test. We now worry about hygiene, wearing face masks and our health.

The psalmist begs us to meditate and focus upon God; His love is unfailing, his praise extends throughout the whole earth, he is righteous, he is just.

This pandemic has resulted in a 50% surge in online searches for prayer as people turn to God to cope with anxiety and hopelessness. Daily data on Google shows that the increase in the number of inquiries for 'coronavirus prayer' has been a global phenomenon. In the UK, 1,600 people registered for an online Alpha course. Online Churches have grown. Many of us have found the pandemic has led to questions about our faith from our family and friends. Many of us have had more time to pray, study and

attend small groups online. Consequently, our faith in and love for Jesus has grown. Sadly, for many this is, has not been, or is not now, their experience. The pandemic has left some grieving, confused, fearful, angry, isolated and with many mental health issues. Never has our focus on Jesus been so needed.

Citadels, temples, towns, and societies we know can fail and fall, but God's love never will. Psalm 48 was written so that every generation is aware of this, "tell them to the next generation," and what an amazing story we must tell. It is Jesus that saves us. The name above all names. Those who know Jesus have the strong tower, the citadel, the dwelling of God, Jesus, within us not as bricks and mortar around us. We are the new Zion, no 48, the dwelling place of God

1 Corinthians 3.16 says, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?"

We cannot help but tell the next generation about his love. Faith as small as mustard seed grows when we

focus on Jesus and learn his ways. I like to think that a small community of believers witnessing to the community such as Four Marks will spread the Good news of Christ just as yeast spreads through dough and makes it rise. The *Talking Jesus* series study many small groups are undertaking is an example of how to reach out to our community. We as people with Christ in us can become a citadel, a strong tower for others. People turn to us and we like a light in a lighthouse show them the way to Jesus. Amen

Psalm 48 in the message bible ends with, "Our God forever, who guides us to the end of time." Those who know Jesus are protected for ever and ever means forever. Even though our bodies will die, we will not be separated from Jesus. Malcom Duncan writes

*"May you discover the heartbeat of Christian faith; death does not win. Amidst sorrow and loss may God remind you that the grave is not the end. Death lies to us, causing despair and fear, but Christ has conquered it. May this promise lift your eyes and give you hope."*



This is the hope the Nation is wanting. Let us go and tell them.

**Prayers:** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)

- 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 7<sup>th</sup> after Trinity:** Generous God, you give us gifts and make them grow: though our faith is small as mustard seed, make it grow to your glory and the flourishing of your kingdom; 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 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 remains open for private prayer.

**Church Services:** Following our recent PCC meeting we will begin holding Sunday services in the building from 2<sup>nd</sup> August at 9.30. For those of us able to come it will be an opportunity to experience God together. We will be maintaining the 2m social distance and this will limit numbers to just under 50, but people can sit in household groups. We be using video from our online church, as we are not allowed to sing. We will not be offering communion until we have assessed the building for being able to manage this safely, and we cannot yet offer Kids Church or creche, nor yet serve tea and coffee.

