

# 17<sup>th</sup> March, 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.



**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:**

By grace alone somehow I stand  
Where even angels fear to tread  
Invited by redeeming love  
Before the throne of God above  
He pulls me close with nail-scarred  
hands  
Into His everlasting arms  
When condemnation grips my heart  
And Satan tempts me to despair  
I hear the voice that scatters fear  
The Great I Am the Lord is here

Oh praise the One who fights for me  
And shields my soul eternally  
Boldly I approach Your throne  
Blameless now I'm running home  
By Your blood I come  
Welcomed as Your own  
Into the arms of majesty

Behold the bright and risen Son  
More beauty than this world has  
known

I'm face to face with Love Himself  
His perfect spotless righteousness  
A thousand years, a thousand tongues  
Are not enough to sing His praise  
Boldly I approach Your throne  
Blameless now I'm running home  
By Your blood I come  
Welcomed as Your own  
Into the arms of majesty

This is the art of celebration  
Knowing we're free from  
condemnation  
Oh praise the One, praise the One  
Who made an end to all my sin

Boldly I approach Your throne  
Blameless now I'm running home  
By Your blood I come  
Welcomed as Your own  
Into the arms of majesty

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

### **Read Nehemiah 13:15-31, John 12.20-33 – Be Holy**

We've reached the final in this Nehemiah series – today we're looking at the whole of this last chapter. We've jumped over some of the previous stories and I'd encourage you to read back over these.

We have seen how the Jews, led by Nehemiah, have rebuilt the walls and established themselves as God's people. Last time we had the renewing of their commitment to God, which they even signed.

Since then, after 12 years away, Nehemiah has returned back to his old job in Persia serving the king, but now he's back to see how it's all going, and the it's not going well. As Timothy pointed out last time, their commitment faltered – Entropy kicked in. We are in need of constant renewal. We want holiness as conferred by Jesus, we want salvation but without the daily work of the Spirit, we have no hope!

God wants us to live in the fulness of life that he has for us. He wants to bless us. But when we chose to live other than God's best, it risks harm to ourselves and others. Nothing satisfies the longings of the human heart, but God himself. As Augustine said, 'our hearts are restless until we find our rest in you God.'

God gives us guidance, instructions, and there's a risk to society, to family, and to ourselves, if we choose contrary to the manufactures instructions. Like trying to assemble flat-pack furniture with no regard to the instructions.

For Nehemiah, living God's best was non-negotiable. Compromise was not an option – God's holy 'laws' were not up for negotiation. God's laws, Nehemiah recognised, were for our best, like a 'sharp bend' road sign they steer us away from danger, and create safe places for all to live their truly best life.

Chapter 13 gives us four examples:

Firstly, be watchful of our hearts. Tobiah, a determined enemy of the wall-building project, had wheedled his way into the heart of the centre of worship. He was living in the temple! He was not a priest, and had never sought the well-being of the people of God.

If we are individually and collectively the 'city' today – what do we want at the heart of our lives as individually and communally? What values, hopes, and dreams do we want to govern us? What are we going to watch and listen to – do we want to grow whole and well, or do we want to risk our well-being?

Allowing Tobiah, an enemy in was a disaster! He undermined all that was good. If you're allergic to nuts, you're careful about not bringing nuts into your home Why would we allow things to pollute God's house, his temple, which is both us as individuals and together as the church? Be careful what you eat, but also what you watch, hear, and read. These might be toxic to our hearts.

Secondly there was a failure to be community. The people had stopped caring about each other and especially about the importance of worshipping together – they had stopped sharing their resources and enabling God's work to flourish.

We are not made for ourselves. We can only flourish with each other, and most importantly, together with God. This requires us to join-in; to serve and share the gifts, skills, abilities, and stuff, including money we have. In the earlier chapters there were a lists of names demonstrating the way in which all can be involved. Selfishness and hoarding never leads to joy! We are blessed to be a blessing and we are accountable to God for ourselves and all he's given us.

Thirdly the failure to be human beings and to trust!

We were made as human beings, not human doings. The very first thing God gives us to do in the creation story is, to rest! God challenges us to trust. The Sabbath is an indicator of our trust and reliance upon God – we're dispensable! The Sabbath is also a symbol of Heaven (see Hebrews 4:1-11). None of us are called to be lazy, but we're endanger of being slaves to doing, and God invites into joy, and rest – to be re-created! Slaving is dehumanising.

Fourthly, the failure to secure the future.

The people of God were to pass on the faith, to share the good news of God's love, with all, and especially with their families. Jews were not to risk their faith by marrying those who stuck with 'alternative views'. Nehemiah discovers that the children can't even read or access the news of God, because they don't have the language.

Today is a baptism, and this is challenge for N's parents, but is a challenge for those of us individuals who have influence over children, but also for us as a congregation. In just one generation the knowledge of God could disappear. Hence need for Youth and Children's minister.

So, are you going to look after your heart. To be careful to feast on healthy things, to be committed to community, to seek by God's grace to be fully human, and to pass on the Good News.

Take time to pray thanking god for all he's given you, and commit to him again.

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent:** Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; 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: April 17<sup>th</sup> at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: April 17<sup>th</sup> at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: March 27<sup>th</sup> and April 24<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: Sunday March 24<sup>th</sup> 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.