



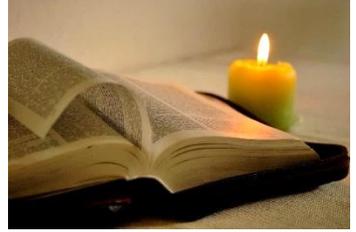
The Good  
Shepherd  
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

18<sup>th</sup> April 2021

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 set out below.



**Opening Prayer (Collect for Purity):** 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:**

See, what a morning, gloriously bright, with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem.

Folded the grave-clothes, tomb filled with light, as the angels announce, "Christ is risen!"

See God's salvation plan, wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice, fulfilled in Christ, the Man

For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping, "Where is He laid?" As in sorrow, she turns from the empty tomb.

Hears a voice speaking, calling her name. It's the Master, the Lord raised to life again!

This voice that spans the years, speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us, will sound 'til He appears.

For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

One with the Father, Ancient of Days, through the Spirit who clothes faith with certainty.

Honor and blessing, glory and praise, to the King crowned with pow'r and authority!

And we are raised with Him. Death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered. And we shall reign with Him.

For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead!

**Read:** John 1:1-18

***God Among Us.*** *A summary of the talk given by Howard Wright.*

We begin a new series today. During the pandemic, it's been important to stay close to the Bible and with the texts we're given that reveal God to us. There are important issues we face:

1. The pandemic has impacted us all individually, our mental and physical well-being has been affected with the isolation we've felt from family and friends. And much as many of us have been protected by our rural isolation and/or financial security, it has still impacted us all. We've found ourselves with less patience or more anxious, and many of us have lost people we love. How do we move forwards from this?

2. As a church family we have struggled with cohesion, communication has been so tough during this disconnected time. We are currently mid-process, led by our PCC Strategy Team, wrestling with what 'church' will look like on exiting lockdown, including facing changes with the opportunity of welcoming in Medstead as partners with us. How are we to move forwards?

3. As a society, we face challenges, not least economic, and this will exasperate existing tensions, one of the key ones being 'difference'. How will we live together with others? Especially when those others are

different from us, with different values, class, religions, ethnicity, genders, and sexualities. How are we to move forwards as a society and as a church, particularly when the church has not always been a safe place for debates about these differences?

I would encourage you over the coming days and weeks to read and re-read through John's account – you may even want to read it along with John's letters or comparing it with one of the other Gospel's. If reading is not your thing, find a recording of it being read, online or via a CD – talk to me if you struggle to find access. Either way, do listen and hear the words and even more, see and hear the God who speaks today through the Word!

John begins with God. He is clear that God is, as revealed to the Jews, the supreme other God. And yet, this God speaks the Word, and does something remarkable, like the Greek pretender gods, he interacts with us, and taking it further, becomes one of us, and lives with us.

John begins with God. Do we? Is God my beginning, John (though there is some scholarly dispute it is the same John) would later write about Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega – in other words – the beginning and the end, our starting point, and our ending.

Am I more bothered by the opinions of others, than by what God thinks of me? Giving more time to my own

thoughts, and preferences (perhaps prejudices), my own wants, to remember to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Just taking this phrase – am I whole-hearted, focussed first on God? Do I just look to God to satisfy my soul; is that why my life is filled with other business and busyness? Is my mind clear about God's priorities for my life, or has every thought taken captive of me – rather than me taking every thought and making it obedient to God (Romans 12). And is my physical ability, directed to Kingdom values and work?

Is my vision of God big enough? Do I realise that as I face an unknown future, this God is supremely able to handle any issue? Jesus holds our light, which is our very life. And the darkness cannot defeat it.

This God is completely other, yet, as one translation puts verse 14, he moves into our neighbourhood – the Greek phrase, means, 'pitched his tent.'

Not only is this God big enough; he also comes close enough. Jesus walks with us in the same dirt, in the mess of human life, the joys and the sufferings. He lives as a refugee, mixes with people of difference and hears their stories, is rejected by his own people, and dies the most agonizing of deaths – yet the darkness cannot defeat his light and life. God, the

incomprehensibly vast creator, the one who just speaks, and it's done. This God, The Word, lives among us – Emmanuel.

In our opening today, John summarizes the Gospel, God comes, full of truth and grace. Notice that couplet, truth – usually understood in a harsh way, an absolute, usually thoughts and words, design to judge between things – to highlight difference AND grace – the outworking of love and acceptance without cost. Too often we have seen truth, without grace, or sometimes, grace without truth – God offers us both, and both are required to be properly human, that is, to be the children of God.

And this is the Gospel – God comes in truth and grace to make us children of God. Love (God is Love) comes in love to invite us into love. And to all who we receive it is done!

We can move forwards with confidence – God is big enough, in fact, bigger than we can even begin to imagine – but he is also close, he comes close to us in Jesus and in us by his Holy Spirit.

We are called to walk in his light, to receive and live in his love – full of grace and truth.

As we face challenges, let's walk forwards in company with Jesus and in love.

**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: 3<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter Sunday.** Almighty Father, who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord: give us such knowledge of his presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life and serve you continually in righteousness and truth; 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 for ever. **Amen.**



**Blessing:** God the Father, by whose love Christ was raised from the dead, open to us who believe the gates of everlasting life. God the Son, who in bursting the grave has won a glorious victory, give us joy as you share the Easter faith. God the Holy Spirit, whom the risen Lord breathed into his disciples, empower you and fill us with Christ's peace. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

**The Notices:** We are now holding ticketed and socially distanced services in the building on Sundays at 9.30am. Further information on our website or by ringing our vicar, Howard.

If you know of others who would like to receive this, or you would 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.

