

# 19<sup>th</sup> February, 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:**

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;

naught be all else to me, save that thou art.

Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;

I ever with thee, and thou with me, Lord.

Born of thy love, thy child may I be,  
thou in me dwelling and I one with thee.

Be thou my buckler, my sword for the fight.

Be thou my dignity, thou my delight,

thou my soul's shelter, thou my high tower.

Raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor vain empty praise;  
thou mine inheritance, now and always.

Thou and thou only, first in my heart,  
Ruler of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, when victory is won  
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!

Heart of my heart, whatever befall,  
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.



The Good Shepherd  
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

## The Sermon

**Rev. Howard Wright: Responding in Baptism.**

**Read Ephesians 4:22 – 5:2; Matthew 5:1-12.**

Our vision, Responding to God's Love. We are living, Responding to God's love. Baptism is one such response. Baptism is a symbol, a sacrament – an outward sign of something important.

Many of us, privileged to be married, wear a wedding ring. It doesn't make us married, but it's a sign of a reality beyond the ring. Baptism is such a sign of identification and alignment with Jesus.

In baptism we identify with Jesus. Jesus was himself baptised to identify with us (Matthew 3).

We identify specifically with Jesus' death and resurrection. Romans 6:3-4 *'...all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.'*

Baptism comes in various forms. It can be performed in any place with water. And so, baptisms have been held in rivers, seas, baptistries, paddling pools, and beside bowls – stone, metal, glass or pottery. And is enacted by immersion – a sign of the death to life, or by sprinkling, a sign of washing/cleansing.

The church has discussed and disgracefully fought over the means of baptism but what does God think? God wants to make us clean. Ezekiel 36:25-26. *'I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.'* He welcomes us all – by faith. There is only baptism and different churches follow different practices – I think God wants us to be baptised and follow him. He isn't going to set rules, though he may lead us to be obedient to any church we find ourselves in. What's important is that we are baptised – and this is commanded.

In baptism we align ourselves with Jesus – our allegiance is to Jesus, and we live in obedience to his command. Matthew 28:19-20. *‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’* And Peter on the day of Pentecost challenges the convicted hearers that they should ‘repent and be baptised’, (Acts 2:38).

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The proof of baptism is in the living, the subsequent behaviour. We are to live as baptised people – aligned with Jesus in thought and deed. It is no good wearing the clothes, the uniform, but living in opposition to the look. (Galatians 3:26-27) *‘So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.’* With this in view, read again, Ephesians 4:22-5:2, and this time read on to chapter 5 verse 5.

We can have the wedding ring, but behave like we’re not married! We can be baptised – but behave like we’re not! It is estimated that around ½ of the UK population have been baptised. Imagine if they all lived aligned to Jesus!

How will we behave – we can’t do it ourselves, we need God’s help. Ask daily for that cleansing and a new heart, as in Ezekiel 36 quoted earlier.

Baptism is our ordination, our commissioning to mission and ministry. We are to be disciples that make disciples – see Matthew 28:19-20. We make disciples as we proclaim Jesus by our deeds and words, and by inviting others to ‘follow’ Jesus. This might begin with an invitation to coffee or a meal, or further to a church event or even an Alpha course, or church service. Be praying that God might lead you to fully living as a baptised, identified, aligned, and commissioned disciple of Jesus.

**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: Sunday Next Before Lent (Quinquagesima).** Almighty Father, whose Son was revealed in majesty before he suffered death upon the cross: give us grace to perceive his glory, that we may be strengthened to suffer with him and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory; 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:** *Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; 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.*

**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. 15<sup>th</sup> March at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 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.