

20th August, 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:

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come:
'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease:
I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
the sun forbear to shine;
but God, who called me here below,
will be forever mine..

The Sermon by Martin Beckwith

God is Almighty. Read Psalm 84 and John 2:13-22

Might. Power. Strength. The ability to make things happen; to affect other people's lives livelihoods and liberties. If it's exercised well and with authority it's an enormous driver of good. But we usually hear when it's abused and becomes bullying, oppression, tyranny. And that makes us cynical or suspicious of it.

God is "Almighty". More mighty than anyone/thing else. It's one of the adjectives we use almost automatically about him, "Almighty God" "to whom all hearts are opened who forgives all who truly repent blessing of God Almighty father, son and Holy Spirit be with you. Our view of God's almighty-ness is invariably restricted by our own imagination /experience. But God created world and everything in it and maintains it still. And the more science advances the larger our appreciation of God's power becomes. And he will continue to execute his almighty, divine sovereignty and judgement regardless of peoples' thoughts and actions. But he can only use his might for good. God's might is invariably mixed with his holiness, goodness and strength which form his character. Think of, eg, Isaiah 6 or Exodus 33. The tabernacle and the temple – the subject of the psalm - were laid out to demonstrate his power and holiness and restrict access to God's presence.

But this creates a tension between God's power, awe and might and his father-like, personal, approachable qualities - which we probably talk about more. God's majesty stops us getting too familiar and reminds us of his holiness, purity, perfection, "otherness", and ensures we take him seriously. That's why we do the staff work before approaching him; eg we go through the confession, peace, the consecration. It's not just ritual. It's part of recognising his power and holiness before we meet with him.

This psalm is the thoughts of someone who is homesick for the house of God. He's missing God. He's envious of the birds who flit in and out of the temple, they're nearer to God than he can be. He longs to be there himself. But it's not just the physical architecture – he wants to be with God's people, like-minded, on the annual pilgrimage to temple in Jerusalem; costly, difficult, dangerous and uphill and see them turn it into something tolerable, enjoyable, uplifting as they travel. Maybe you've been homesick for God, away from the fellowship or the

worship and teaching. It's right to want to meet together with other Christians, (Jesus himself was "in the custom" of going to the synagogue) to offer corporate worship, teaching, prayer, communion, fellowship. It's the collective "strength in the Lord" v5. The psalmist prefers to be a doorkeeper, to stand at the threshold, on the fringe, of God's house than to be anywhere else. He knows the ultimate goodness of God. And that's good enough for him. "Blessed is the one who trusts in you." v12.

Then in our NT reading Jesus himself went further. Jesus is saying to his disciples and also to us, that in order to know God, to get close to him, to approach the Almighty-ness and bring God into the context of our time and space, we need to look at him – Jesus. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father (God) ... I am in the Father and the Father is in me". And if you need proof, look at the works "signs" I've been doing during my time with you (and most notably the resurrection a few days later.) If, like the psalmist, you're looking for God, Jesus says he's the Way. When he died and took on himself the sin which separates us from God, the curtain in the Temple the psalmist so missed, which screened off the Holy of holies, was torn in two from top to bottom. The most potent symbol of that separation and restricted access was removed in perpetuity and God's almighty presence open to all.

Paul develops this further: Col 2:9 "In Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form." Jesus carries God's almighty-ness just as much as God the Father does himself – and yet Jesus became a man, a human being, specifically to be our access to God.

For some people like the psalmist, faith can be very much God-focused – which is of course not a bad thing. But the New Testament is adamant that forgiveness of sin and salvation are found in and through Jesus.

When we come to know and love Jesus as saviour and lord we are adopted into God's family as his children with all the privileges of family membership. (1 John 2:1-3). God is almighty and holy beyond our understanding yet wants to be closely and intimately involved with us. Not on the periphery, as a doorkeeper like the psalmist expected, but as a much loved son or daughter, welcomed, and incorporated into the family. And with the promise that one day we will see Jesus in all his almighty glory, face to face. And that one of those "rooms" in God's house will be ours for ever. That puts our present pilgrimage, though still often difficult, into better context.

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: Eleventh Sunday after Trinity: *O God, you declare your almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity: mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace, that we, running the way of your commandments, may receive your gracious promises, and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure; 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 & Bowls: Wed. 20th Sept. at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Wed. 23rd August & 20th Sept at 11am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise TBA.
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays.
- COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.