

# 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2025

## 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.**

### **Hymn:**

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,  
pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty;  
hold me with thy powerful hand:  
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
feed me now and evermore,  
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain  
whence the living waters flow:  
let the fiery, cloudy pillar  
lead me all my journey through:  
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,  
be thou still my strength and shield,  
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan  
bid my anxious fears subside:  
death of death, and hell's  
destruction,  
land me safe on Canaan's side:  
songs of praises, songs of praises  
I will ever give to thee,  
I will ever give to thee.

songs of praises, songs of praises  
I will ever give to thee,  
I will ever give to thee.!

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

### **Read Revelation 2:1-7 and John 15:9-17 – The Loving Bride**

This week we begin looking at the seven letters in Revelation.

The letters follow a pattern. Starting firstly, with to and from – the from being a further declaration of Jesus and who he is and represents. Secondly, a commendation for beliefs and behaviours which are good (with the exception of the letter to Laodicea). Thirdly, a challenge about the beliefs and behaviours which threaten their relationship with God and an exhortation to change - repent. And, finally an encouragement to continue faithfully and receive the rewards available.

The letters are scene setting and preparing us for the vision to come. John is saying: Will you listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches and respond? Will you succeed or fail? There are seven letters, a 'complete' number of types of challenge identified, the implication is that we all face them all and that victory brings great reward, failure brings catastrophe.

Our first letter is written to the church in Ephesus, the city, introduced in Acts, visited and written to by Paul. Ephesus was a wealthy and influential place, home to the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, one of the wonders of the ancient world and it was seen as the capital city of the region.

Each letter introduces Jesus in a slightly different way, and the differing visions of Jesus present him perfectly for the issues raised in the letter. Providing either reassurance or a warning, depending upon the churches response. Here Jesus is revealed holding the stars, and who walking among the lampstands. Here is revealed, the Almighty, the creator God, who holds all things, our life, in his hands.

The lampstands represent each church. Zechariah has vision of lampstand (Zechariah 4), with the oil required for the light representing the Holy Spirit. This image of Jesus therefore, serves as a reassurance and warning that he is in charge of the power that gives them life as a people and church.

The church is commended for not tolerating wickedness (v.2), that it tests for truth in teaching (v.2), and has endured hardships. (v.3). This includes 'hating' the Nicolaitans (v.6). This group gets mentioned again, but they are not fully known. Ancient sources suggest that their teaching was most likely a syncretism between Christianity and pagan practices. Not unlike the folk-Christianity of our age – those who claim to be Christian but do not know Jesus (Matthew 7:21-23) understanding little of the beliefs and practising little of the behaviour. As someone once quipped, Jesus is Lord of all, or he is not really Lord at all!

The church is condemned for having forsaken its first love. This is despite the theme of love in Paul's letter to them – see Ephesians 1:15, and Ephesians 3:14-19.

They had truth and some right behaviour, but they risked being without love. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, you can have all the right ideas and practises, but if you don't have love, it's worth nothing – 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. A failure to love God, purely, whole-heartedly, single-mindedly, risks disaster.

The marriage hasn't happened yet, but the beautiful bride, the object of the bridegrooms love and affection, the one for whom his 'paid' a great price – his own life, his blood shed upon a cross – this bride has turned elsewhere and lost her love for the bridegroom. Read James 4:4. The church is looking elsewhere for satisfaction, see Jeremiah 2:13.

The church is challenged to respond, to notice how far it has fallen, and return (repent) or lose their light and life. Our spiritual and moral failure does not usually just happen, usually we slowly slide towards it. The Ephesian church has slowly slid away – as we might! What started as good, disciplines we loved at first which kept us faithful to God, can slide – and we risk losing touch with life itself – the lamp might go out!

Despite their importance – the first city of the region, mentioned first, the city and church remain at risk. The city's wealth came from their port, but the river silted up – it's source of life disappeared, and what was such a great city is now a pile of ruins. The lamp fed by the oil of Spirit might well go out – if we allow it to silt up. See Matthew 24:12.

When you lose something, where will it be? Right where you left it of course. The church has lost its first love, where will they find it? God is right there, waiting for them and for us. Repent, turn around and go back to where it started. Re-read the scriptures, take time to pray, put God first – seek first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). Keep in step with the Spirit – that oils our lives (Galatians 5:19-26 – especially v.25).

Ephesus, the lead church, commended for its love, has fallen in a generation, and within a few more generations disappeared completely with the city. But for those who are victorious – who will overcome - the right to eat from the tree of life. The church continues and through-out the world is growing faster than the global birth rate! Let's ensure we heed the words of this 'prophecy' and stay connected to Jesus the source of life.

**15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity:** *God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love: grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; 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, St Andrews and 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).

### **At the Church of the Good Shepherd**

- Tea and Praise for Harvest: Sunday October 5<sup>th</sup> at 3pm in Church.
- Tea and Chat and Bowls: October 15<sup>th</sup> at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: October 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

### **For Further information:**

This paper and all parish details are on the website at  
<https://www.parishofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>