

# 31<sup>st</sup> August, 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:**

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
born of his Spirit, washed in his  
blood.

This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.

Perfect communion, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture now burst on my  
sight.  
Angels descending bring from  
above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest.  
I in my Saviour am happy and  
blessed,  
watching and waiting, looking  
above,  
filled with his goodness, lost in his  
love.

This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.  
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## The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

### Read Psalm 103 and Luke 7:11-16 – Praise the Lord

In Psalm 97 we saw God as universal king, whose name is proclaimed throughout the cosmos. God's kingship is still the context for our reading today, but God's mercy and forgiveness is now the focus. In Psalm 103, that same God is seen as our tender parent, whose name is blessed for his actions in the history of his people.

In our prayers, we need to understand that we are still standing before the throne, and addressing the cosmic ruler, but that we are also sitting with our Father. We are not only his creation but his covenant children. So majesty is followed by mercy, rule by redemption, awe by assurance. The same sovereign who rules the universe remembers our fragility and our limits, and does not treat us as we deserve. So our response is not fear but blessing.

We bless him for "all his benefits" (v.2), of which the principal and highest benefit is our salvation (Virginia opened this up a few weeks ago in her sermon on Psalm 98).

So our blessing him is stimulated not just by our observation of the created order, but by our recollection of his salvation. For the psalmist, this was shown in God's actions in the life of his people Israel (v.7). He, of course, was composing between the commencement and the perfection of God's mission of mercy, between Israel and Christ, so he could not consciously see the whole picture. **We can.** For us, the picture comes into focus when we look at Jesus and the cross, and we are able to respond to both.

But remember that we are not just reading, we are to become the people of these Psalms. Psalm 97 converts the imagination; Psalm 103 converts the memory. Both form our prayers, individual and communal.

But there's more. Have we truly answered the most important question for any sermon: *How does this text bear witness to Jesus Christ?*

Going from Psalm 97 to Psalm 103 is moving from rejoicing to blessing. If a poem begins and ends with the same words – “Bless the Lord, O my soul” – that means something important. But why should we bless God?

Because of his “steadfast love” (vv. 4, 8, 11, 17). What does this mean? This word is a key Biblical description of God (in the Old Testament it is used about 240 times, and in Psalms 120 times!). It’s sometimes translated “lovingkindness”.

When we read Psalm 97, we rejoiced because God is King. We bless him because of all he has done for us in his lovingkindness, his steadfast love. Look at our Gospel reading: Jesus raises a dead man – why? The answer is in v.13: “*he had **compassion** for her*” or “*his **heart went out** to her*”.

I was expecting, as I looked up the word, that it would be a translation of that wonderful Old Testament word for lovingkindness. It wasn’t. It was much less abstract than that, more physical, more visceral. Literally gut-level. He felt it in his insides.

Why this very physical word, rather than the usual translation? Because Jesus is the incarnation – the making into flesh – of everything God is and does. He is the incarnation of God’s lovingkindness. God’s steadfast love, celebrated in the Psalms, is now embodied in Christ’s gut-level response to the mother’s grief. Jesus is “the body language of God”. Jesus not only speaks about God’s mercy – he **is** it.

Israel knew the lovingkindness of God through the covenant, and through the Psalms and liturgical blessings; we know it because **we have seen Jesus!**

In communion, we absorb into our bodies the physical symbol of the physical, incarnate reality of God’s lovingkindness. In serving others, we embody that lovingkindness ourselves, though the power of the Holy Spirit living in us.

**11<sup>th</sup> 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, 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 Chat and Bowls: September 17<sup>th</sup> at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: September 24<sup>th</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>