

22nd January, 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:

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav'n, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art.
Visit us with thy salvation;
enter ev'ry trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into ev'ry troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy life receive.
Suddenly return, and never,
nevermore they temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without
ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation;
true and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

Sermon by Rob Hughes: **Responding Joyfully**

Read Romans 15:5-13 & John 16:16-28

How many stop to consider what effect Jesus is having on our lives, our understanding, the decisions we take, the choices we make? If we do not recognise God at work in us, we can't speak about it, we can't be encouraged by it; we cannot consciously participate in it. Daring to say we have both seen **and** participated might seem boastful. But every life is potentially an agent in God's work.

Paul says to Roman Christians '*May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.* Paul acknowledges we cannot have Jesus attitude of mind without responding to it. However, responding in our own strength is a mistake: But what are our strengths? What have we to give?

Faith's early effects led me try my own skill at 'making Christians'. 'You obviously mean well', said the object of my attentions. 'But it's easy for you. You've all you need, little to worry about!' He was right. I learned later that he had a severely handicapped son. His burden was so much heavier than mine. Responses like that told me to learn to listen first, to consider who *I* was, and only then decide what I could offer to another life. My faith was not to be employed like a blunt instrument. And events since have proved that conclusion is sound.

Some time later, I asked my employers if they would let me start a Lunchtime Bible Study Group. First they were surprised - then grumpy. There were several valid objections. But I had already worked out it would be difficult for them to say an outright 'no' because I was in charge of HR. The Bible Study meetings went ahead. It opened some eyes.

Eventually, someone at those meetings told me they were leaving to join a Faith Based Charity serving the unemployed and homeless poor of South East London. And when I thought about his decision, I realised my own skill-set could also be of value to that work. However, it appeared out of the question - the financial loss was surely too big. Nevertheless, my wife gave her support; my offer was accepted; and for the next three years, I saw the impact of my giving. I have never tithed. But my wife and I have given ourselves in other ways.

So who or what leads us to take decisions of that kind, to donate our time, energy, skills and money? There is no praise or credit due. All we have ever done is to listen and respond when a call seemed 'meant for us'. Jesus reminds his followers in Acts 20:35 that "It's more blessed to give than receive." And I can truthfully claim that, when we respond to need, God brings joy and a sense of fulfillment.

Paul goes on to say, *'I tell you that Christ has become a servant'*. Our lives make it possible for others to live their lives. Our relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is certainly not one of Master and Servant. Yet everything we do either serves or holds back God's work. When we come face to face with hardship, suffering and injustice, it is right to ask what we can do to make it right.

Jesus, tells his disciples: *'Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.'* But how are we to know what to ask for until we see the need? Which reminds me of an episode I shared with this congregation about ten years ago: My wife Pip and I had been on a cruise ship holiday. The passengers came from 'all over' - including the USA. And for some reason, everyone wanted to talk to me about faith - constantly. I did not - perhaps to my shame - encourage them. But it happened anyway. Every meal was filled with God and religion. I simply could not escape it!

So when we boarded the plane home I was relieved. And then - you guessed it - a young man arrived immediately before the plane door closed, and sat beside me. For twenty minutes all was quiet. Until he turned to me and said: 'Would you mind if I talk with you? I am facing some issues in my life which are hard to understand. Maybe you will be able to offer advice.' During the next few hours I listened whilst he shared, offering what I could to his troubled marriage, the breakdown of his relationships, and his sense of being lost.

There was much about his circumstances I understood from my own experience. Our encounter was no trivial accident. Can you see what I am driving at here? We were responding together to God's call in John 15: *'If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love. I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. ... love one another' ...*

I'm not asking how much you give to God, to people in need, to fund his work on Earth. God does not measure in earthly terms. I just ask you to remember that what makes us 'good' is not our selves but what God has already given us. But we have to use it! Remember the parable of the Talents: **Matthew 25:14-30**. Keeping our goodness to ourselves leaves the world a poorer place.

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: Third Sunday after Epiphany. Almighty God, whose Son revealed in signs and miracles the wonder of your saving presence: renew your people with your heavenly grace, and in all our weakness sustain us by your mighty power; 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: *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. 15th Feb. at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: 25th Jan, 22nd Feb at 11am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: TBA
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays. COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.