

# 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2026

## 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:**

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my  
Father;  
There is no shadow of turning with thee.  
Thou changest not, thy compassions,  
they fail not;  
As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness,  
Great is thy faithfulness,  
Morning by morning new mercies I see.  
All I have needed thy hand hast  
provided;  
Great is thy faithfulness,  
Lord unto me.

Summer and winter and springtime and  
harvest,  
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses  
above  
Join with all nature in manifold witness  
To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and  
love.

Great is thy faithfulness,  
Great is thy faithfulness,  
Morning by morning new mercies I see.  
All I have needed thy hand hast  
provided;  
Great is thy faithfulness,  
Lord unto me.

Pardon for sin and a peace that  
endureth,  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to  
guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for  
tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine and ten thousand  
beside.

Great is thy faithfulness,  
Great is thy faithfulness,  
Morning by morning new mercies I see.  
All I have needed thy hand hast  
provided;  
Great is thy faithfulness,  
Lord unto me.

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

### **Read Revelation 18:1-17 and John – 12:37-48 The King's Refusers**

**(Read Revelation chapters 17, 18 and 19 to get the fuller picture.)**

As we've been seeing, in Revelation we are invited to, 'come up and see' (Rev. 4:1) the reality behind this world.

In Rev. 17:3 John is carried into a desert – especially pertinent during Lent, as the Biblical symbol of desert is time to step aside and recalibrate giving ourselves time to see afresh the past, present and future realities.

We have seen that God is in control, and that he wants all to know his love and enter into the fullness of life now and forever – as children of God. God is constantly inviting all in – not wishing that any would perish (2 Peter 3:9).

Rejecting God results in us losing our humanity, become increasingly beastly. Those receiving God's invitation are known, named, and loved, and accompanied through the highs and lows of life.

The world has not sought the Kingdom of God, we have formed our own empires and societies, based on our own selfish and godless values and aspirations. The empires we have created are symbolised here in Revelation as Babylon, the unholy city and empire, the exact opposite of the New Jerusalem, the holy city and dwelling of Kingdom of the King of Kings.

Babylon, like every 'empire' construction of man, from the Tower of Babel in Genesis (11:1-9) easily becomes a perversion of the Kingdom of God, being built upon greed and selfishness with the fruit of immorality, idolatry, and injustice. Babylon is a beastly parody of the God's design, the life and freedom he has for us. See Revelation 17:5.

The biblical critique is not aimed only at Rome in John's day; it targets any human empire or institution that sets itself up against Christ: past imperial powers and every modern form of domination—corporations, fashions, institutions, new technologies, influencers—that promise prosperity and pleasure at terrible cost.

Empires and systems of human power offer security, prosperity, status and delight, but they exact a terrible human price. Revelation's catalogue of Babylon's trade and vanities at her fall lists the luxuries and merchandise (Rev. 18:11–13). Behind such luxuries often lie exploitation and environmental destruction, with workers, farmers and craftspeople whose wellbeing was

disregarded. Historical and present injustices are part of this picture: transatlantic slavery and colonial profiteering, and in our day persistent forms of modern slavery—forced labour, debt bondage, and human trafficking—still afflict millions. The comforts of the affluent world frequently depend on the suffering and poverty of others.

God summons his people, Rev. 18:4-5. Christians are called to live differently, refusing the world's seduction (1 John 2:15–17). The heroes of faith are held up as examples: they lived as foreigners and exiles, longing for a better, heavenly country rather than turning back to the comforts of the world (Heb. 11:13–16). Believers are reminded that their citizenship is in heaven and that they eagerly await the Saviour from there (Phil. 3:20).

Being a distinct people means more than private piety; it means concrete justice and visible holiness. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation called to declare God's praises and to live incarnationally among nonbelievers (1 Peter 2:9–12). Our conduct should be such that, even when accused, our good deeds point others to God and glorify him. The call is to abstain from sinful desires that wage war on the soul, and to live a countercultural life of righteousness and mercy.

There is a promise of vindication and rejoicing when justice comes. Heaven and God's people are called to rejoice at Babylon's judgment because God will judge her with the same judgement she imposed on others (Rev. 18:20). Yet judgement leads to celebration: the wedding of the Lamb is announced, the bride has made herself ready, clothed in fine linen that stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people (Rev. 19:7–8). This coming marriage is not merely symbolic of vindication; it signifies the restoration and fulfilment of God's purposes when God's people, faithful in exile, are gathered into the life God intended.

God calls us to see, to resist, and to live as citizens of his kingdom. He challenges us to refuse the seductive and exploitative systems of 'Babylon,' to stand with the oppressed, to wage spiritual warfare with divine weapons, and to live now as a people anticipating and preparing for the wedding feast of the Lamb. God is sovereign, walks with the suffering, and promises ultimate renewal for those who endure as faithful strangers in a world that has often chosen empire over kingdom.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent:** *Almighty God, you show to those who are in error the light of your truth, that they may return to the way of righteousness: grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ, 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:**

- Palm Sunday Tea and Praise at 3pm, Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March, in Church.
- Tea and Chat and Bowls: March 18<sup>th</sup> at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: March 25<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>