

2nd November, 2025

The paper-version Service



St Andrew's
Church



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks
Responding to God's Love



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:

Come, thou Fount of every blessing;
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.

Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above;
praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
mount of God's unchanging love!

Here I raise my Ebenezer;
hither by thy help I'm come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger,
interposed his precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart; O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above.

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Revelation 3:1-6 and John 2:13-21 – The Active Bride

In our series from Revelation we're at the fifth of the letters, the letter to Sardis. Sardis was the leading city of its area, located on a trade route it was a centre for the textile industry. But in AD17 an earthquake levelled much of the city, and it was, in John's time, a city of departed glory but still believing itself a place of prestige and importance. We might think of many towns and cities in the UK in a similar position.

As in all the letters Jesus is introduced as the one who holds the seven spirits and the seven stars. It is Jesus who holds the very source of life, the Spirit, the breath of God, the Ruach, along with the stars, the light of life – without which we perish. See Colossians 1:16-17.

Again, as with all the letters it begins with an 'I know...'. However, this time, so critical is its condition that there is no commendation, the letter moves straight to a serious condemnation. The Church of Sardis in a dire state and yet blind to its own failings.

The church has a good opinion of itself, and to some extent from the surrounding churches Reputation, but, it is not alive, but dead. Though there was an outward busyness giving the impression of life, there is no spiritual life, no connection to God.

There is a failure to confess – to declare God's Kingdom and to point to Jesus by their deeds and words – see Matthew 10:32-33. And, there is a failure to complete – they are starters but not finishers. The church had received and heard, but not fulfilled the promise. Notice the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23) and read Matthew 7:20-23. They had all the external signs but none of the inner power.

We might think that they have an excuse: consider the threats faced in Smyrna, (see Revelation 2:10) can we blame them? Yet there appears here no threat of persecution from without or of false teaching, heresy, from within. The Christians of Sardis seem to have committed to a lifestyle of avoiding hardships or too much stress – seeking caution, convenience and comfort. And unbeknown to themselves they are by their inaction drifting into extinction.

We are challenged here too. In what way might our reputation outstrip the reality? Have we genuine life in us, or we just playing at church and discipleship to Jesus?

Jesus' call to them is to, wake up!

There is hope left – with Jesus there is always hope! They are to strengthen what remains, finish what they started, remember what they've heard, obey what they've received, and repent. We might summarise this as, turn from their misdirected self-preservation and live in response to Jesus and his teaching, as revealed to us in His Word, the Bible.

The consequences of continuing on their current trajectory are dire. The citadel of Sardis was built on a seemingly impregnable acropolis, but it was taken twice in its history and on both occasions forces attacked at night when the city had failed to be watchful.

Jesus warns the Christians of Sardis, that if they fail to 'watch' (see Matthew 24:36-44) and act, that they will be caught out.

There is hope offered to the church. Some have preserved themselves, and there is opportunity for others to be part of this too.

For those who remain committed to Christ, focussed on Jesus, (See Philippians 3:13-14, Hebrews 12:1-3), there is great hope.

These people will walk in white – arrayed as the finest citizens of Sardis, this textile capital would be. White is a symbol of purity and white robes will appear again in Revelation 7.

But more significantly those have their name in the book and will be publicly acknowledged before the Father. We will have seen films in which the great and good arriving at some royal banquet are announced by name to great fanfare and greeted warmly by the host. This is the honour that awaits us and all those who hold fast to Jesus.

Christ, he who holds the life-giving Spirit and stars – angels of the churches – can raise the dead, and bring life to us again. God wants us to succeed, he's looking for us. We may need to constantly renew our commitment – to remember, and act on what we've received and live.

If we hear, let's truly listen, and respond with our whole being.

20th Sunday after Trinity: *God, the giver of life, whose Holy Spirit wells up within your Church: by the Spirit's gifts equip us to live the gospel of Christ and make us eager to do your will, that we may share with the whole creation the joys of eternal life; 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: November 19th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: November 26th 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>