

5th January, 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:

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven 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 every trembling heart.

Come, Almighty to deliver;
let us all Thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore Thy 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.

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away our love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

Finish then, Thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see Thy great salvation
perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before Thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright.

Read Isaiah 2:1-5 and Mark 8:34-9:1 -- Being Lord

We continue our series through Mark's Gospel. We reached the central verses last term, 'Who do you say I am?' And now Mark turns to the 'so what?' If Jesus is the Messiah, (the Christ), the son of God – what kind of Messiah is he and what does that mean for us?

Someone forwarded this 'notice' to me: *'Please avoid morning walks and gyms from the 1st to 5th of January 2025. Heavy crowds of determined people who have made resolutions are expected during this period. The situation will get back to normal from the 6th January onwards.'*

So what resolutions might we or others make. Top of the list for 2025 includes: save more money, get fitter, spend more time with family, and stop smoking. Nowhere on the list is, deny myself more, take up my cross, and follow Jesus!

What do we want to achieve this year? Or using the word of Jesus in our Mark passage, what do you want to gain? For many the option of the whole world, would be an attractive one. And there are movies and books, which have characters literally selling their souls to gain, happiness, love, security, riches, power, health, peace, etc. Many live today selling themselves in the search for greater security, significance, love, and purpose – which we mostly assume is found in the unholy trinity of money, sex, and power.

And let's be honest, that many who live like this, includes ourselves at times. The temptation of making it about us and taking the easy route is common to us all. Jesus was offered three easy ways out in his own temptations – it was a bespoke offering, carefully chosen for him, as the most enticing. Our own temptations seem to fit us perfectly, offering the 'heaven' we crave. We all seek love, security, significance and purpose – it's how we're made but the world's offering is a fake, it doesn't satisfy, it never has, from Adam and Eve to now, and our souls are at risk.

Our failure to achieve satisfaction from these things leaves us two choices try harder, live faster, or, lower our expectations – a secular psychologist's go-to. But Jesus is saying, don't sell yourselves short. Read Matthew 11:28-30 and John 10:10.

Denying ourselves and taking up our cross indicates a belief and trust in Jesus. Denying ourselves and taking up our cross indicates a willingness to sacrifice ourselves, to give our life away, for a better deal – old traded in for the new and improved. In our broken humanity (the Bible call this ‘the flesh’) we want to be in control ourselves, to gain my rights, to live for I, for me, for my, and for mine. Jesus calls us to something much braver and ultimately satisfying.

This is not just giving up chocolate, it’s giving up my occupation with myself, and my desire to make myself god. It’s allowing Jesus to be Lord. I have my rights, The priorities of our age are get more, more money, stuff, power, security, and satisfy our appetites. Read Philippians 3:18-21.

Jesus gave is all for me – his power, majesty, glory – and he stepped down to save my soul – so valuable did he think my soul, and eternal life was. So what value am I going to put on my own soul – how am I going to live in response to this extraordinary sacrifice.

Denying ourselves and taking up our cross, is not to say we don’t exist! It’s to put Jesus first, to live our lives for him not for ourselves – it’s the opposite of selfishness, self-interest, and self-protection. Read Galatians 2:20.

To deny ourselves is to live as we, if we stop and think about it, is really how we want to live, read Galatians 5:22-25. Pastor Ken Sauer, American Pastor: The happiest and most productive Christians are those who have forgotten themselves into immortality.

Denying ourselves and taking up our cross is not being ashamed of Jesus. There is this ‘strange’ comment at the end of this passage, read Mark 8:38. If I am ashamed to live like Jesus – a life of sacrifice, then I am not part of him, I’ve not understood the greatness of who he is. And I’ve not recognised my need of forgiveness, nor the wonder of the glory ahead of me – in other words, I am not really a believer, I am not believing in the real Jesus, and I am certainly not a disciple.

So what resolution do you have for this year? Don’t sell yourself short. Keep your eyes on the prize – which is Christ and glory! Notice the glorious vision in our Isaiah reading and the finishing words: *Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.* So let us believe in Jesus, and follow him, completely. We’ll make mistakes but keep coming back to him.

Epiphany Sunday: O God, who by the leading of a star manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: mercifully grant that we, who know you now by faith, may at last behold your glory face to face; 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: January 15th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: January 15th at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: January 22nd at 10.30am in the 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.pariahofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>