

6th April, 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:

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth
Pouring out the oil of love as my
worship to You
In surrender I must give my every part
Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken
heart

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a friend, to so loving a
King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be
sung
As a praise of Your name for the things
You have done?
O my words could not tell, not even in
part
Of the debt of love that is owed by this
thankful heart

You deserve my every breath for
You've paid the great cost
Giving up Your life to death, even
death on a cross.

You took all my shame away, there
defeated my sin
Opened up the gates of heaven and
have beckoned me in

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a friend, to so loving a
King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be
sung
As a praise of Your name for the things
You have done?
O my words could not tell, not even in
part
Of the debt of love that is owed
Of the debt of love that is owed
Of the debt of love that is owed by this
thankful heart
Oh
By this thankful heart
By this thankful heart.

The Sermon by Martin Beckwith

Read Isaiah 53:10-12, Mark 14:32-42 – Being Ready

For several months we've been following Jesus' life through Mark's gospel. The central point is where, in answer to Jesus' question, "*who do you say that I am?*" Peter declares "*you are the Christ*"/*Messiah, the son of God*".

So how on earth did the son of God get to be in the position we've just read about? In the garden of Gethsemane. To be crucified in the morning. The darkest night of the soul. We read Jesus was, "*deeply distressed and troubled... overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*".

To put this into context we need to go right back to the beginning - not just of Mark but of the whole bible, where it says in the beginning God created the heavens, the earth and everything that's in, on and under them. It's interesting, but not particularly important to wonder how, when and where that happened but let's have no debate that it did – if you think the countryside bursting into life around us is an accident, you're a braver man than I am.

And what God created was perfect. It couldn't be improved. But mankind used our God-given ability to do our own thing and "improve" or spoil it. So it became imperfect. The Church describes anything which isn't God-perfect as "sin". Society thinks of sin as something naughty but nice, and often that's true, but it's far more than that. The Anglican liturgy brilliantly defines sin as anything gone wrong "*through negligence, weakness or our own deliberate fault*". It's everything that distorts life, even those things we may not notice or understand. It damages relationships between people, between people and God, and between people and creation. And it doesn't just affect an individual. It has corrosive impact on communities and their environment. Its tentacles and malicious grip affect and demean everyone and everything. Does that make you a bad person? Of course not, humanly speaking. We live with imperfection. It doesn't excuse it, but it's part of life. We all know that. But spiritually it destroys any sort of the intended present and future relationship with God.

God is repelled, revolted by sin. It makes him really angry - the Bible talks about God's "wrath" against sin and anyone or anything affected by it. God will go nowhere near it. He rejects it, just like our bodies reject mouldy, "off" food. God and sin can have no interaction. The Bible talks of a contrast between "light" and "darkness. A complete separation. Discarded. Sin matters to God. It's a serious point because everyone is touched by the effects of sin and the bible says God will

always reject, discard, anything sinful. The word often used is that it will “perish”, when all God’s power and presence is withdrawn.

So from the earliest times people have tried to remove, eliminate, neutralise sin from our lives but found it was impossible. We quickly realised that without God—without the word of God—we are left endlessly striving to make our way through life on our own terms which history frequently shows is often disastrous.

But remember the famous verse, John 3:16. It says *“God so loved the world he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life”*. So God, as it were, had a conundrum: being perfectly holy he could not associate with sin, but being loving of his creation he cannot simply reject it either.

So God chose to endure that separation, the consequences of sin, himself on our behalf. *“...not wishing that any should perish”*. He himself, in the form of Jesus, whom Peter declared was *“the Christ, the son of the living God”* - was born on earth as a man, lived the sinless life we’ve been considering – but then perished, or as Apostles’ creed puts it, “[he] .. was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell”.

And that’s where pick up this passage in Mark. It’s the Thursday evening before the Friday morning when Jesus was crucified. He is anticipating the reality of a horrible death, inflicted by those of his own creation, but, worse, to be separated from his father, in order to *“take away the sin of the world”*, so that, as the verse puts it, *“whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”*.

We cannot remove sin ourselves. But when Jesus died the sin of the world was transferred onto him and God *“remembers it no more”*. The separation is removed. The bible calls those in Christ a *“new creation”*. It doesn’t happen automatically. It’s for *“whoever believes in him”*, or whoever *“declares with their lips that Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that God raised him from the dead”*. That’s all there is to it, but it takes a conscious act of individual thought and will. It cannot be delegated, inherited, bought or assumed. Nor should anyone be pressured into it.

No one has to believe in Jesus’ work to be welcome in COGs. Though the Bible is clear the sin-separation will become permanent once we die or when Jesus returns. Believing Jesus’ work, and trusting him for eternal life is unlikely to make anyone richer or cleverer. The same problems and bills will exist tomorrow morning as yesterday evening. The legacy of past experiences is still carried forward. And the bible says clearly that the physical consequences of trusting

Jesus could be severe, as Christians in many countries, and sometimes here at home, are experiencing today.

But, of course, Jesus didn't stay dead. Gethsemane and Calvary weren't the end. If he were just another dead hero we wouldn't be here today or the Church exist worldwide. There are plenty dead, heroes. On that first Easter day he rose from the dead. We often sing "*his buried body began to breathe*". And is alive today, the separation is gone, and by his Spirit is with us now, individually and collectively. A bit, as it were, of Jesus' DNA influencing attitude and giving context and a different dimension to the slings and arrows of life and the world, and also eternity. Our first reading, in Isaiah, foretold that, "*...by knowledge of him many will be justified because he will bear their iniquities.*" We will not perish. Sooner or later we will be with him for eternity.

"Who do you say that I am?"

5th Sunday of Lent: Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; 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.*

At the Church of the Good Shepherd

- Tea and Chat and Bowls: April 16th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: April 23rd 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.pariahofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>