

9th February, 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:

All my soul to God I raise;
Be my guardian all my days.
Confident in hope I rest,
Daily prove your path is best.
Ever work in me your will,
Faithful to your promise still.

Mercies manifold extend,
Not as judge but faithful friend.
O my Saviour, hear my prayer,
Pluck my feet from every snare;
Quietude be mine at last,
Rest from all my guilty past.

Graciously my sins forgive;
Help me by your truth to live.
In your footsteps lead me, Lord,
Joy renewed and hope restored,
Knowing every sin forgiven,
Learning all the ways of heaven.

Sheltered safe when troubles fret,
Trusting God I triumph yet!
Undismayed in him I stand,
Victor only by his hand.
Worship, homage, love and praise,
All my soul to God I raise..

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Isaiah 30:12-17 and Mark 10:17-31 – Being Priority

In today's story we have a wealthy man, whom Matthew and Luke tells us was also young and a ruler.

Clearly this is a good man with a lot going for him, youthfulness, wealth and a prestigious occupation. This man also looks good from a spiritual perspective. He *runs* to Jesus, showing a desperation to have an answer for his spiritual condition. He falls on his knees at Jesus feet. He does not parade his importance, but is humble in seeking the truth. And he goes the right source to find his answer.

He addresses Jesus as, Good Teacher. And Jesus replies, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good – except God alone.' This 'good' man is being challenged already. Firstly, none of us, including you, are 'good' enough. Secondly, if you're calling me 'good', you're calling me God – and are you prepared to have to obey God's words.

Jesus starts with the commandments, Jesus quotes some, and the man replies that he has kept all of these since he was a child. The ones Jesus quotes are about behaviour towards others, except one if missing! That is 'do not covet'. This may not be significant, but it seems Jesus is treading gently and encouraging the man. He may be so wealthy that there's no one else to envy. However, Jesus doesn't mention the commandments about behaviour toward God, for example, have no other god's before me, and do not have idols.

We are told touchingly, that Jesus looked and loved this man. But Jesus would not sell him short, and sugar coat the deal. He tells the truth, with love. One thing you lack, sell all you have, give it to the poor and follow me and then you will have treasure in Heaven.

We are all called to take up our cross and follow Jesus. To give our all to Jesus. To serve other things is essentially idolatry. Any allegiance to anything other than God is unholy and inhuman – it's not what we were made for. Jesus is not anti-wealth he is anti-diversion from our true purpose, anti-anything that makes us less than human and consumes us by ungodly desires.

In Mark 8:36 Jesus challenges us '*What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*'

This good man went away sad because he had great wealth. He appeared to have so much, yet, in reality he had nothing of value for he risks losing all! Someone said: FAITH = Forsaking All, I Trust Him. Others come sad to Christ,

and been healed. This man comes desperate and leaves sad – the only person recorded as such. Today, do not harden your hearts. You may need to commit to him for the first time, or recommit yourself. You may need to repent – admit your misdirection – and turn back to God. Don't miss out like the Roman Governor Felix – Read Acts 24:25. And read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2.

The disciples are no nervous. A seemingly perfectly good candidate for Heaven appears to not be getting in – so how can anyone get in? Jesus' answer is shocking. It's easier for a camel, the largest animal that the disciples would have encountered, to go through the eye of a needle, the smallest gap they'd have known, than for rich man to enter Heaven.

Now, there are challenges with wealth – it provides a significant distraction to following Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be dependent upon him, to be wealthy risks being dependent upon money and its associated power. We are wealthy – just 12% of the world's population have a car, and only 53% own their own home, but what sort of home? We have a great deal.

Many I talk to, reflecting about their own eternal destiny, declare, 'well, I've lived a good life' or about their loved one, 'they were a good person, they never hurt anybody'. We may not openly express our goodness, after all, we're terribly humble, but do we risk, even thinking 'well', I'm not as bad as them! This 'good' man, and the disciples are challenged – they want to be good, maybe they even think that there good enough. But they are not and neither am I, and neither are you!

The disciples respond 'Who then can be saved?' And Jesus responds, what is impossible for man, but possible for God. Because only God is good. So, only God can do the 'impossible' and make a way for 'not-good' humankind to gain Heaven (see Romans 3:23 and 1 John 1:8-9).

Our culture that tells it's children, 'you can be anything you want to be'? But Jesus has a message about being the person you're made to be – not settling for anything less – that would be idolatry – to worship/serve a different god. Only God is good and he has a truly good life for us now and forever – a life lived in company with him and for him, the one who truly loves us. And it's only by the goodness of Jesus, a free gift he shares with us!

So how do we live? Read, 1 Timothy 6:6-12.

5th Sunday of Epiphany: Almighty and ever-living God, clothed in majesty, whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple, in substance of our flesh: grant that we may be presented to you with pure and clean hearts, by your Son Jesus Christ 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: February 19th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: February 19th at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: February 26th at 10.30 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.parishofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>