

18th May, 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:

There is one Gospel on which I stand
For all eternity
It is my story, my Father's plan
The Son has rescued me
Oh what a Gospel, Oh what a peace
My highest joy and my deepest need
Now and forever He is my light
I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

There is one Gospel to which I cling
All else I count as loss
For there, where justice and mercy meet
He saved me on the cross
No more I boast in what I can bring
No more I carry the weight of sin
For He has brought me from death to life
I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

There is one Gospel where hope is found
The empty tomb still speaks
For death could not keep my Saviour down
He lives and I am free
Now on my Saviour, I fix my eyes
My life is His and His hope is mine!
For He has promised I, too, will rise
I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

And in this Gospel the church is one
We do not walk alone
We have His Spirit as we press on
To lead us safely home
And when in glory still I will sing
Of this old story that rescued me
Praise to my Saviour, the King of life
I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Sermon by Timothy James

Read Psalm 1:1-6, John 15:1-8 – Rooted Life

Let me tell you a parable. I have a climber in my garden: it is called *Akebia quinata*, or a Chocolate Vine. Here is a picture.



As you can see, it is pretty healthy. It has spread at least 18 feet along the fence. The only problem is that, although it flowers every Spring (it has just finished), it never produces the sausage-shaped purple fruits which are characteristic of this plant. Perhaps Hampshire is too cold.

The key point is this: it has **roots**, but no **fruits**.

Why does the writer of Psalm 1 assert that some people (“the righteous”) are like a tree planted by a stream? The psalm speaks of taking root near water, which prevents withering and produces seasonal fruit. This picture is used frequently in scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. In a dry landscape, with little rainfall, when you see greenery far off it indicates the presence of a watercourse.

The psalm attributes this outcome to what the righteous **avoid** and what they **cultivate**: they avoid the way of the wicked – even their company; they meditate constantly on God’s law.

The message is that two sources promise success – a life that “prosper” (v.3b) – but only one actually delivers. Despite the apparent success of those who ignore God’s way, their prosperity eventually withers – see Psalm 73 for a detailed picture.

But the gospel reading (John 15) takes this further: each part of the plant must retain its **connection to the parent plant**, and selective **pruning** is necessary for maximum productivity. In our garden, I hate cutting off anything which is not actually dead, but my wife hacks things back really hard. Her way often produces vigorous new growth. Pruning, if done right, means more fruit: counter-intuitively, cutting away parts of the branch promote more productivity.

But above all, fruitfulness, or even continued life, depend on the continued physical link with the parent plant (and its roots), and if that is broken the branch has no use except as low-quality fuel.

How, then, do we take action to be on the right side of this image? Are we to be a healthy tree, or chaff? How can we keep our living connection with Jesus? Certain negative and positive steps are laid out for us.

- Avoid the company of the ungodly.

The psalms consistently distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, the godly and the ungodly. This does not mean that we should expect sinless perfection – we are righteous because we are justified by God, not because we always get things right.

But pragmatically we can identify those whose lives will not help us to stay rooted in God, and whose company we should therefore avoid. How can we do this? The next step will help.

- Immerse yourself in scripture.

If you want to be firmly rooted by the water, constant – daily – contact with God’s word is a necessity. This will keep your judgment clear, your insight reliable, your life fruitful. This is another constant theme in the Psalms (Psalm 119 – the longest – is about nothing else). As Paul says, we will be “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2).

- Obey Jesus’ commands.

Immersion in scripture will teach us what Jesus requires of our lives. We are not truly connected with him until we both **know** and **practice** what he has commanded (Jn. 15:10). But if we are connected (and allow him to “prune” our disobedient habits), we will be fruitful.

One of Jesus’ principal commands, of course, is to give the good news about him to everyone (Matt. 28:19-20, Lk. 24:47, Jn. 20:21, Acts 1:8). What better fruit than the lives of more people also rooted in him and producing fruit?

5th Sunday of Easter: Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: grant that, as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires, so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect; through Jesus Christ our risen 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: May 21st and June 25th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: May 28th 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>