

19th October, 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:

The church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven, He came and sought
her
To be His holy bride
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

Elect from every nation
Yet one o'er all the earth
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth
One holy name she blesses
Partakes one holy food
And to one hope she presses
With every grace endued.

'Mid toil and tribulation
And tumult of her war
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore
'Til with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest
And the great church victorious
Shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth had union
With God, the Three-in-One
And mystic, sweet communion
With those whose rest is won
O happy ones and holy
Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly
On high may dwell with Thee
Like them, the meek and lowly
On high may dwell with Thee!

The Sermon by David Bush

Read Revelation 2:12-17 and John 14:22-26 – The Learned Bride

Pergamon was one of the churches John wrote to in Revelation, many of these letters to the churches were of a similar pattern, and a similar message, but many were tailored with references that brought the meaning alive to the listeners.

- The city was a religiously dense environment, with strong cultural traditions where likely belonging and participation in ceremony and ritual mattered both for social acceptance, advancement and success.
- Under Roman rule, it was a regional centre, the proconsul of Asia resided in Pergamon for part of the year, and it was his seat of Roman judicial authority in the province. The provincial governor held “the right of the sword” — the power to inflict capital punishment.
- Pergamon was also an early site of emperor worship. It erected an early temple for Caesar and Augustus and as a temple-warden city meant it had a formal civic role in the imperial cult, thus shaping local religious expectations, laws, finances, and social standing.

This was the religious ‘Seat of Satan’ with its dominant Greek and Roman temples towering over the city. Where the ‘sword’ was a political reminder of the power of death of the Roman consul.

And it was the home of little stones. Stones that represented admission tokens to social events, and stones that represented life or death sentences in the court.

In AD 90 the problem wasn’t that Christians here didn’t believe in God — it was that their whole environment defined a reality, worth, and acceptance through involvement in the historical and contemporary behaviours and practices. To “worship the emperor” was to affirm:

“I belong, I am seen, I am part of the system that keeps order.”

So the issue was that identity was constructed by participation and conformity.

John might be paraphrased ... “Pergamum looks like a dangerous place to be a Christian — but the real danger isn’t what Rome can do to you if you refuse to conform, it’s what happens to your soul if you give in.”

So in his letter this white stone functioned perhaps as the antidote to both fears:

- against external power (the sword of Rome) because it says, you’re already vindicated;
- against internal compromise (the temptation to blend in) it says, you belong elsewhere.

It reminded persecuted believers of divine approval unseen by the empire.

What are the social pressures we see today to conform, that put us at risk — not of not believing in Jesus — that was never John’s challenge to Pergamum — but of compromising our behaviours, or beliefs, or Christian lives?

You'll find your own I'm sure but let me suggest two candidates. The first is the social power implicit in the rise of what seems to me to be an increasingly tolerated form of neo-extremism, embodied in politicians, commentators and current affair broadcasters. You'll spot this if you look –

- If you hear an encouragement to hate someone, to blame someone because they are in some way different to you
- If you're invited to conform because 'everyone knows ...' without any actual argument or evidence.
- If there is an urge on you to think in a dichotomy - this OR that – agree OR disagree – for OR against.

All these things are things that seek to force alignment, force social conformity at the expense of ostracization and exclusion, of not being 'in' if wone doesn't agree. Well let me tell you, the stone metaphor says you are ALREADY in ... you've already got admittance.

And my second example is technology, or at least the technology that is central to our obsession as a world with social media. I think this is similar to Pergamon, here is how ...

Ritual participation: Temple feasts, Daily posting / online presence,
Symbolic tokens: White stones, civic badges, Verification badges,
follower counts,
Collective orthodoxy: Worship of Rome's gods, Dominant online,
narratives, outrage cycles.
Idols: Sculpted gods, Curated self-images and influencers.

Today we can perhaps restate the idea that this white stone is Revelation's reminder that real identity, value and worth is bestowed, not performed.

If John wrote to the church at Four Marks and Medstead

"I know where you dwell — where the ping, ping never sleeps,
where algorithms shape desire and truth,
and yet you hold fast to my name.

But some of you have learned to eat the food of the feed,
to bath in the rhetoric of the neo-extremist,
to trade your hidden self for public approval.
Repent, and I will give you the hidden manna —
nourishment unseen by the metrics of men."

Today we can perhaps restate the idea that this white stone is Revelation's reminder that real identity, value and worth is bestowed, not performed.

18th Sunday after Trinity: *Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us your gift of faith that, forsaking what lies behind and reaching out to that which is before, we may run the way of your commandments and win the crown of everlasting joy; 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: October 22nd and 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>