

16th March, 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:

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness,
Great is thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hast provided;
Great is thy faithfulness,
Lord unto me.

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Great is thy faithfulness,
Great is thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hast provided;
Great is thy faithfulness,
Lord unto me.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine and ten thousand beside.

Great is thy faithfulness,
Great is thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hast provided;
Great is thy faithfulness,
Lord unto me.

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Isaiah 29:13-16, Mark 12:28-44 – Being Loving

In our series today from Mark, Jesus continues to be tested, and respond with wise answers. Today we have probably his most famous statement – which is two quotes from the Old Testament. With his answer his questioners are finally silenced. And so, as if to drive home his authority he challenges with his own question (Mark 12:35-37) to which they have no answer.

There then follows two, seemingly unrelated to the discussions and each other, stories. However, these bring us to the key question, what's the orientation and motivation of our heart?

Other than Jesus, the key players in this passage are the teachers of the law. The teachers of the law are the Bible students, preachers, and vicars of the day. They are widely respected, revered and feared. They are known for their fearsome intellect and knowledge of the scriptures. They are the gatekeepers to the way to God and heaven.

They would have expected to win in a debate with Jesus, after all they are the elite class, with all the power and honour. Jesus is uneducated and unlettered.

Now, not all teachers of the law are equal! Notice that the one who asks Jesus the question about the greatest commandment, addresses him with respect and gives him honour. 'Teacher', *Rabbi*, he calls him. And Jesus commends him following his clearly thoughtful response, as 'not far from the Kingdom of God'.

There are other players in this story: the widow would have been barely noticed by most – but notice that Jesus notices (Mark 12:41-42).

The 'treasury' mentioned were large metal boxes with trumpet like access – it's recorded by contemporary writers that there were thirteen, each inscribed with the different sacrificial purposes for which this money would be used. It was money given to God (love for God), which would benefit the whole community (love for neighbour).

Money when thrown in would make a noise. It was possible to make quite a show of your giving, and some would have done, unless you were giving two tiny wafer-thin coins, and you were already virtually invisible yourself, as a poor widow.

Along with the teachers of the law and the widow, there is also the crowd and the disciples.

The crowd, the undecided, who having welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem a couple of days before with shouts of acclaim, would, in a few days' time, demand his execution. And, the disciples, who, although they've followed Jesus for three years, are, for the most part, about to run away in fear as the man they thought was the Messiah, the Son of God, was taken and crucified.

The key question in this passage, for the teachers of the law, the widow, and by the way, for the crowd and the disciples is what is our response to God to be? They've all just heard what the greatest commandment is – see Mark 12:29-31. The question could be rephrased as, 'What is the one thing I should do?' Or maybe, as Jesus' question to Peter after the resurrection, 'Do you love me? (John 21:15-25)

So, who are we in this story, where are we orientated? What do we love? And, do we love God with everything?

The widow, gives all, everything! Heart, soul, mind and strength. To God, and which would benefit of her neighbours. And, note, giving in this story is judged by what we have left not by what we've given – see Mark 8:34. And remember the oft quoted joke/parable about the how for a breakfast meal, the chicken made a contribution, but the pig made a sacrifice!

The teachers of the law were obsessed with image and what they could get out of this – they weren't prepared to risk anything. The questioner in this passage, also a teacher of the law, risks being ostracised by his colleagues, as he honours Jesus, and is subsequently declared as being not far from the Kingdom – note Mark 8:36.

The crowd, went along with what everyone else did – failing to take responsibility for their own individual decisions and actions. They liked Jesus when he pleased them, but they weren't prepared to love. And, the disciples lacked full understanding, there was love, but their fear was stronger and this caused them to flee.

So, how about us? As we go through Lent, there is opportunity to reflect. Are we all in? Take time to talk to God, listen to his word, and fall in love again.

2nd Sunday of Lent: Almighty God, you show to those who are in error the light of your truth, that they may return to the way of righteousness: grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ, 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: March 19th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: March 26th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Easter Tea & Praise: Sunday 6th April, 3pm.
- 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>