

21st July, 2024

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.**

Song:

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that
flood,
Lose all their guilty stains:
Lose all their guilty stains,
Lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners, plunged beneath that
flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away:
Wash all my sins away,
Wash all my sins away;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God

Be saved, to sin no more:
Be saved, to sin no more,
Be saved, to sin no more;
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.

E'er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die:
And shall be till I die,
And shall be till I die;
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

When this poor lisping, stamm'ring
tongue lies silent in the grave,
Then in a nobler, sweeter song
I'll sing Thy power to save:
I'll sing Thy power to save,
I'll sing Thy power to save;
Then in a nobler, sweeter song
I'll sing Thy power to save.

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Philippians 4:1-3, United

A sign of the Christian Church is devotion to the apostles teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. In our study together of the apostles teaching, with our now formal partnership in the Gospel, we've been studying Philippians.

Last week we saw that we need to grow to maturity. And to do so we need good models, to eat well, and live as citizens – that is, give our primary allegiance to Christ.

This last section of Philippians looks at how we live today as we wait for the full Kingdom of God, and eternal life in the presence of God. And, in our reading today, two people have fallen out. So what? Surely this happens all time, in families, at work, between neighbours. It's not nice but so what?

It matters. And it matters because as Christians we are citizens of heaven! As such, we are to live as citizens of Heaven, not Phillipi, not England, or even Medstead or Four Marks. The church is to be a sign of the Kingdom of God, a mini version of the Kingdom. As Phillipi was a mini-Rome, so the Church is to be a replica of heaven. The issue is not what they have fallen out over, but that there is disunity, discord, disharmony, among the people of God – a family falling out and potential for a congregational, or whole church falling out.

As a replica of Heaven, we are to be exemplary in our dealings with others, the best at love, full of joy, exuding forgiveness, and living lives of peace. And this is not just the people we like but the whole people of God, indeed all people, including the unwelcome. We are to love our neighbours – everyone – as we would want to be loved ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). Read John 13:35 and 1 Peter 2:12.

So how can we avoid falling out, and help others in disagreement with each other.

Firstly, we must stand firm in the Lord, by recognising what Jesus has done for the other. Jesus has brought peace by his death for us: read Ephesians 2:14-18. Read 1 John 2:9-11. John recognises it is a scandal, Jesus having paid for unity by his death on the cross, that anyone claiming to belong to be a Christian would speak ill of another Christian. Christ shed his blood for them, how dare we not value them also! As Paul says, these people's names are in the book of life, they are precious. See them as precious and as Paul describes the Philippians: [those] *whom I love and long for, my joy and crown*.

Secondly we must stand firm in the Lord by staying close to Jesus. Our behaviour and attitudes change depending upon who we are with – we might

Speak differently to another if our mum, or a daughter, or granddaughter is with us – how much more so if our heavenly Father is with us. Stay connected to Jesus – it's harder to fall out with people if God is right with us. When Jesus gave us the Lord's prayer, he warned us about forgiveness (read Matthew 6:12-15). In order to stay close to God, we need to join in with the actions of the church – see again Acts 2:42.

Thirdly we are to be of the same mind. Paul says, I plead with Euodia and Syntyche – be of the same mind in the Lord. We may not agree on everything, but agree on Jesus. Paul uses this same mind expression earlier in Philippians, read Philippians 2:1-11. We need to look beyond the problem and see the things you can agree on. And be humble, like Jesus. In conflict resolution we're taught to begin, 'I have a problem would you be able to help me?' And it begins as we read in Matthew 18, by going to talk to them on your own.

Fourthly, if talking to them on your own doesn't work, or isn't appropriate then, again as Matthew 18 directs, enlist help. Or, if there are others we observe, offer help. This is different to talking to others and getting them on our side. We are to be on the side of peace, not the side of a person! Remember we are citizens of heaven, not seeking power and influence. It's not about winning, or getting our way – it's about unity, love, and the purposes of God.

Joshua asked the angel of God who stood before him whether he was on their side or their enemies, and the angel replied, 'neither', see Joshua 5:13-14.

In verse 3 we read, *'Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women'*. There's quite a discussion among scholars about whether there is a person behind, 'my true companion' or whether it refers to us all. It's a moot point – it means us all – you and me! We are to be peacemakers. To help find common ground, and the presence and purposes of God in the difficulty.

Finally. Paul had his own disagreements, with Peter, Barnabas, and Mark, but with each of these the relationship was restored. But, sometimes it's not possible. There will be those who refuse peace. Read Romans 12:18. With some it may not be possible.

There may be people, who present a risk to us – and in these cases, though we might need to forgive – and for which we might need help – we need to stay away from them for our good and theirs. But as much as it depends upon us, let's live as children of God and citizens of heaven, at peace with all, seeing beyond the problem, seeing a person beloved by God, as we await our Saviour from Heaven.

8th Sunday after Trinity: Almighty Lord and everlasting God, we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of your laws and the works of your commandments; that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour 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: August 21st at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: August 21st at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: July 24th & August 28th at 10.30am in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: 3pm Sunday, TBA
- 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>