

23rd August, 2026

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:

Your hand, O God, has guided
your flock from age to age;
your faithfulness is written
on history's open page.
Our fathers owned your goodness,
and we their deeds record;
and both to this bear witness:
one church, one faith, one Lord!

Your heralds brought the gospel
to greatest and the least;
they summoned men and women
to share the great King's feast.

And this was all their teaching
in ev'ry deed and word,
to all alike proclaiming:
one church, one faith, one Lord!

Your mercy will not fail us
nor leave your work undone;
with your right hand to help us
the vict'ry shall be won.

And then by earth and heaven
your name shall be adored;
and this shall be our anthem:
one church, one faith, one Lord!.

The Sermon by Mark Hughes.

Read Psalm 111:1-10, Matthew 11:25-30 – Praise Begins with Seeing God

Psalm 111 begins with a simple command: **“Praise the Lord.”** Almost everything that follows explains why.

The Psalm is an acrostic: each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is a carefully constructed meditation, inviting God's people to slow down, remember and contemplate who God really is. Significantly, the Psalm doesn't begin with a problem or with the needs of the worshipper. It begins with **God.**

The Psalmist declares, **“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart.”** This praise is both personal and corporate, offered “in the congregation”. But the focus quickly moves from the worshipper to God: **“Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.”**

That word “studied” suggests more than a passing glance. God's people are invited to reflect carefully and joyfully on His activity. For Israel, God's works were the stories that shaped their identity: creation, deliverance from Egypt, provision in the wilderness and God's covenant faithfulness through successive generations. As they remembered **what God had done**, they were reminded of **who God is**. God's works reveal God's character, and praise grows out of remembering.

There is a challenge here for us. We can sometimes remember our disappointments more readily than God's faithfulness. Our anxieties can become more familiar than His promises: the apparently unanswered prayer, the difficult conversation, the diagnosis or uncertainty about tomorrow.

Yet the Psalms never ask us to pretend those things aren't real.

My dad recently wrote a poem, *The Shadow and the Sun*, reflecting on love, loss and remembrance. One line has particularly stayed with me:

“And love is what we carry when we weep.”

The existence of shadow doesn't mean the light has disappeared. Indeed, there can only be a shadow because there is light. Praise can be like that too. **Praise isn't pretending there are no shadows in our lives; it is remembering, even within them, the light and faithfulness of God.** Christian hope doesn't deny the shadow; it knows where the light comes from.

Psalm 109 showed us that we can speak honestly to God from places of anger, injustice and distress. Psalm 111 invites us to do something alongside that honesty: **remember.**

Verses 4–9 then move from God's works to God's character. The Lord is “gracious and compassionate”. He provides, remembers His covenant, acts faithfully and justly, gives trustworthy commands and provides redemption. God's

provision reveals His compassion; His covenant reveals His steadfast love; His redemption reveals His grace.

When the Psalm says, **“He remembers his covenant forever,”** it doesn't imply that God had forgotten. Rather, God “remembers” by acting faithfully according to His promises. Israel's confidence was not that life would always be easy, but that **God would always be faithful.**

Paul follows a similar movement in Romans 11. Having contemplated God's saving purposes, explanation gives way to worship: **“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”** Contemplation becomes praise. We look at what God has done, glimpse more clearly who God is, and worship follows.

Matthew 11 then allows Christians to see the character celebrated in Psalm 111 revealed most fully in Jesus Christ. The gracious, compassionate and faithful God draws near. Jesus says:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

He doesn't merely tell us where rest might be found. He says, **“Come to me.”** He invites us to bring Him the burdens we actually carry.

This gives Christian praise its deeper foundation. **We don't praise God because everything in life is good. We praise God because God is good.**

Psalm 111 concludes: **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”** This “fear” is not terror, but reverent awe: seeing God for who He truly is and allowing that understanding to reorder our lives. If God is faithful, we can trust Him. If He is compassionate, we can come to Him. If He is just, we can entrust injustice to Him. And if God is God, **we don't have to be.**

Psalm 111 therefore gives us a simple pattern for prayer:

Remember what God has done.

Ask what this reveals about who God is.

Bring Him your burdens.

And allow remembrance to become praise.

Psalm 112, the companion acrostic, then describes the life of the person who fears the Lord. The order matters: first we see who God is; then, by His grace, we begin to see who we are becoming.

The Christian life does not begin by trying harder to praise. It begins by seeing God more clearly. The clearer our vision of God, the more naturally praise rises, trust deepens and wisdom grows.

From beginning to end, **He is worthy of our praise.**

12th Sunday after Trinity: Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than either we desire or deserve: pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of 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: September 16th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: August 26th & September 23rd at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Harvest Tea & Praise: Sunday, 4 October 3:00 – 4:30pm.
- 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>