

27th September, 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:

When peace like a river attendeth
my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot, thou hast taught
me to say,

"It is well, it is well with my soul."

Though Satan should buffet, though
trials should come,
let this blest assurance control:
that Christ has regarded my helpless
estate,
and has shed his own blood for my
soul.
It is well with my soul;
it is well, it is well with my soul.

My sin oh, the bliss of this glorious
thought!

my sin, not in part, but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no
more;

praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O
my soul!

It is well with my soul;
it is well, it is well with my soul.

O Lord, haste the day when my faith
shall be sight,

the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
the trump shall resound and the
Lord shall descend;

even so, it is well with my soul.

It is well with my soul;
it is well, it is well with my soul.

The Sermon by Matt Senior

Read Revelation 19:6-9 & Mark 2:18-22 – God’s Bride

God’s Bride

My favourite part of a wedding is when the bride enters and looks to the groom at the end of the aisle. You can see the love and joy in their eyes and you know that this is going to be a wedding well worth celebrating.

It’s this moment in our reading from Revelation that we have this beautiful moment, “Let us rejoice and be glad...the wedding of the lamb has come...his bride has made herself ready!”

The bible gives us a number of ways of understanding God’s relationship with his people: God’s the shepherd, we’re the sheep. We learn our shepherd’s voice, he guides our ways, and protects us from danger. God’s the father, we’re his children. He provides for us, nurtures us, gives us what we need, and he brings us to maturity.

But the idea of being God’s bride is remarkable. A marriage relationship is one of priority and intimacy. God chooses us, pursues us, makes great sacrifices for us, and he knows and love us, like no-one else can.

The idea of a marriage relationship with God may feel uncomfortable, but if we don’t grapple with this idea of the church being the Bride of God, then we miss out on the immense and intense love that Jesus has for his people.

A healthy marriage is a beautiful relationship but the one between God and his people has had significant ups and downs, where the bride that he loves betrays God or lets him down. This is exemplified in the book of Hosea.

Hosea marries an adulterous woman and in chapter 3, God is having to tell Hosea to reconcile with his wife. She has betrayed him and is being sold. But God’s love is unwavering. He’s not oblivious to the betrayal, but he says, ‘Go, show love to your wife again...love her as the Lord loves the Israelites.’ It’s the same amazing love God has for his people.

The ultimate example of God’s Sacrificial Love for us is the Cross. Just like Eve was formed from Adam’s side, the Church is born from the pierced side of Christ at the cross on which Jesus demonstrates the ultimate devotion of a groom by laying down his life, shedding his blood to cleanse and purify his bride.

Adam gives a rib from his side for his bride. Hosea lacks the wealth to pay the price outright to buy back his bride, so he makes up the difference with barley. Significant sacrifices, but nowhere near matching up to the costly, life-giving sacrifice that God makes for us.

Like the Israelites, demonstrated by Hosea’s bride, we are unfaithful too. So, how can we be the bride that has made herself ready? It’s through the grace of God.

We see in our Revelation passage that “fine linen, bright and clean, was given” to the bride to wear, which “stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.” God’s people do the righteous acts, but it’s a gift from God. Like when my children were small and they wanted to give me a birthday present. Not possessing the funds themselves, I bought it for them. They wrapped it and, when the time came, gave it to me as an expression of love, but they were only able to give it because I made it possible. Our acts of righteousness are only righteous thanks to the grace of God, who paid the bride-price through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

We’ve been made righteous. Now is the time to express *our* devotion, *our* love. To give God glory and to make his name known. But this is what the pharisees believed they were doing in our reading from Mark where Jesus is challenged about fasting.

Jesus isn’t against fasting but the way the pharisees were instructing people had gone well beyond what was set out in law. In Leviticus and Numbers, God commands once a year on the day of Atonement. When Jesus is questioned in Mark, the pharisees are fasting twice a week. The pharisees had done this with many aspects of the law, taken commands and increased them in an effort to make sure that people couldn’t even come close to breaking the law.

But Jesus knows that his presence with his people is a time for celebration, not for performative piety and self-denial. Fasting, like all our actions, should be driven by our relationship with God. Jesus’ presence and Jesus’ sacrifice completely transforms the law.

So as God’s bride, we need to respond to God. Traditions, practices and habits, which the pharisees had in abundance, can be helpful, but you can’t build a healthy relationship on it. To reference the passage often spoken at weddings in 1 Corinthians 13, if we speak in tongues, prophesy, have faith that moves mountains, give away our possessions, but do it all without love, then we are nothing.

If we as a church do all the stuff we do, but do it without a love and focus on God, then it’s nothing and there’s no point in us gathering every week. We’d just be a book club. We’d have readings from the book said out loud, we’d have discussions about what it means, we’d even have the wine! But we’re not here for a book club. We’re here because God chose us, pursued us, gave his life for us, makes us righteous, and invites us into everlasting union with him.

And until that day when we see this final scene in our Revelation reading, we get to spend out lives, individually and as a church, responding to this amazing, sacrificial, life-giving love. A love that makes us holy, and a love that makes us pure.

17th Sunday after Trinity: Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself, and so bring us at last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face; 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: 21st October at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: 28th October 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>