

8 May 2022 HC 2.1

Hymn TIS 179 Praise with Joy

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship **And also with you.**

'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Sentence of the Day

The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Revelation 7.17

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.

Prayer of the day

Gracious God, you sent Jesus, the good shepherd, to gather us together: may we not wander from his flock, but follow wherever he leads us, listening for his voice and staying near him, until we are safely in your fold, to live with you for ever; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

ACTS 9.36-43

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became ill and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.

³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, 'Please come at once!'

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood round him, crying, and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning towards the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes and seeing Peter she sat up.

⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive.

⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Psalm 23

¹ The Lord is my shepherd: therefore, can I lack nothing.

² He will make me lie down in green pastures:
and lead me beside still waters.

³ He will refresh my soul:
and guide me in right pathways for his name's sake.

⁴ Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil:
for you are with me, your rod and your staff comfort me.

⁵ You spread a table before me
in the face of those who trouble me:
you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.

⁶ Surely your goodness and loving-kindness
will follow me all the days of my life:
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Revelation 7.9-17

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' ¹¹ All the angels were standing round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹² saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?' ¹⁴ I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

¹⁵ Therefore, 'they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them," nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; "he will lead them to springs of living water." "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

John 10.22-30

²² Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade.

²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered round him, saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.'

²⁵ Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.'

²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.'

Sermon

Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Let us pray for the world and for the church.

God of Grace hear **our prayer**.

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
John 3.16

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, welcoming sinners and inviting them to the Lord's table.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins.

Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn 145 The king of love

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.

Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

Blessed be God for ever.

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere, mighty Creator, ever living God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who by the power of your Spirit was born of Mary and lived as one of us. By his death on the cross, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin, and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people. And now we give you thanks that you raised him to life triumphant and exalted him in glory. By his victory over death, the reign of sin is ended, a new day has dawned, a broken world is restored and we are made whole once more.

Therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, forever praising you and saying:

Holy, Holy, Holy Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,

Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Merciful God, we thank you for these gifts of your creation, this bread and wine, and we pray that by your Word and Holy Spirit, we who eat and drink them may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread; and when he had given you thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Therefore, we do as our Saviour has commanded: proclaiming his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again, we celebrate, with this bread and this cup, his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Renew us by your Holy Spirit, unite us in the body of your Son and bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, and in whom, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father, in songs of never-ending praise:

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

The body of Christ keep you in eternal life. Amen

The blood of Christ keep you in eternal life. Amen

Prayer after Communion

Eternal God, giver of life, in the breaking of the bread we know the risen Lord.

May we who celebrate this holy feast walk in his risen light and bring new life to all creation.

Hymn 142 Glory be to God the Father

Blessing

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you what is pleasing in his sight; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**



Our gospel reading was the feast of Hanukkah or Dedication. Why is that significant?

Let me tell you a little history: In between the Old and New Testament yet another tyrant had taken over Israel and desecrated the Temple, then a hero called Judas Maccabaeus led a rebellion, defeated the tyrant, rededicated the temple and became king. The people are praising God that they can worship in their temple but also thinking about rebellions and kings, so they ask Jesus if he is the Messiah.

It is a very dangerous question, and in talking about sheep Jesus is skimming very close to danger because in Jewish Theology Kings are always also Shepherds. The Good Shepherd is a metaphor for the restored rule of God throughout the Old Testament and so it always has messianic implications.



We tend to think of the Good Shepherd analogy as a nice, serene picture with the sheep peacefully grazing in the field and the shepherd just watching over them, when a shepherd does his true work when danger strikes, in the form of a lion or a bear. The image of the Good Shepherd is really all about power and rule, about God's kingdom and the world's kingdoms, about God appointing a true king, not in a place where there is a vacant throne but where there have been too many kings all of them grasping for power and ready to strike out at anyone trying to stake a new claim.

So, Jesus returns to the shepherd, sheep theme with a glorious and spectacular promise to his sheep. He promises that those who recognise his voice, his sheep, will be safe for ever. He will look after them, and even death itself, the last enemy, cannot ultimately harm them. The reason Jesus can be so confident of this is that the guarantee in his own unbreakable bond of love with the father, and the fact that his sheep are the ones the father has given him.



This underscores the fact that Jesus and the Father do the same work; what is true of the work of one is true of the work of the other. Jesus gives explicit expression to this inseparable unity when he says, 'The Father and I are one'.

He is saying that he and the Father are united in the work they do. It is impossible to distinguish Jesus' work from the Father's work. Yes, he is the Messiah but both more than, and other than, the traditional expectations for the Messiah, His power is not that of a political liberator who will restore Israel; it is the very power of God, the Father shares with Jesus his redemptive power over life, death and judgement.



In our reading from Revelation the metaphor shifts a little, The Risen Christ is no longer pictured as a human Shepherd but as a lamb. The lamb who sits upon the throne beside his Father. This is the lamb that was slain, the

Passover Lamb who died for our failures. We are his people, and he became a man so that he could be exactly like us and die for us. Or if we are speaking metaphorically: We are his sheep, and he became a sheep so that he could be exactly like us and die for us.

As Paul said in 2 Corinthians (8:9) *For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*



Some people are a little worried by the Book of Revelation, they are not sure how to interpret it but the whole book was written by John in his old age to the early church. The early church is

about to face terrible persecution and they must be ready for it. What he is telling them here is part of his continuing vision; a vision of the heavenly reality which is the truth against which their earthy nightmare must be measured. This he is saying, is the ultimate reality of the situation, and you must hold on to it for dear life as the nightmare unfolds. The reality is that the creator God and the lamb have already won the victory which means that those who follow the lamb are rescued from harm.

This reality is still true today: people who claim the lamb's protection may well have to come through a time of suffering, very few people have a charmed life, but they will eventually find themselves in the true reality, God's throne room, worshipping and serving him day and night with great, abundant exuberant joy.



We will join with the heavenly chorus in worshipping God saying: *'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!* Recognizing with joy that everything good, noble, powerful, and wise comes from God himself. This is not a bare, dry theology acknowledging that there is only one God but the uninhibited shout of praise to the God from whom all blessings flow.

One of those incredible blessings is that all of us who have lived the nightmare that is often the reality of life on earth will wear clothes of white. This is not because we necessarily lived lives of total holiness and purity but because the blood of the lamb Jesus himself, has rescued us from slavery and made us able to stand in the very presence of the living God.

and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,"

nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; "he will lead them to springs of living water." "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, the metaphor has returned to the shepherd, and we are reminded of the wonderful 23rd Psalm.



The Lord will be our Shepherd in this life and the next, God the Father is our Shepherd, Jesus, the risen lamb, is our Shepherd.

Sounds rather like what Jesus said in our gospel reading. Jesus and the Father do the same work; what is true of the work of one is true of the work of the other. 'The Father and I are one'. They work in total unity to ensure that we lack nothing and all those other blessings.

God will protect his people from the elements, and from hunger and thirst and God himself will wipe every tear from their eyes. Isn't that such an intimate and loving promise, that tells us so much about God's love. This is the God we worship, not some faceless uncaring official who wants all the rules followed but our loving shepherd who walks with us every day.

That does not mean that we will have everything we want. Our heavenly Father is not a sugar Daddy who will spoil us with all sorts of things that we want in the moment but in the long term would not be good for us.



What it does mean is that even when we go through tough times, he will be there with us and whether we see it or not he will be protecting us from stuff even scarier than lions and he will lead us through until at last we come to the table spread before us and know that we are home.

The Psalm and Revelation are telling us the same truth, God doesn't just allow us into his presence, he welcomes us and shelters us, literally he will pitch his tent over us, and just like the Israelites travelling with God's tent of the Tabernacle travelling through the wilderness we will receive all the blessing of his presence.



And we can each say:

Surely your goodness and loving-kindness
will follow me all the days of my life:
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for
ever