



ST NINIAN'S UNITING CHURCH

APRIL 2ND, 2025

PRAYERS AND REFLECTION

BASED ON PSALM 53: 1-6

Denunciation of Godlessness

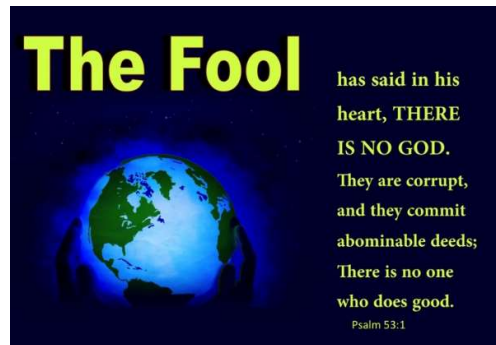
- ¹ Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."
They are corrupt; they commit abominable acts;
there is no one who does good.
- ² God looks down from heaven on humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.
- ³ They have all fallen away; they are all alike perverse;
there is no one who does good,
no, not one.
- ⁴ Have they no knowledge, those evildoers,
who eat up my people as they eat bread
and do not call upon God?
- ⁵ There they shall be in great terror,
in terror such as has not been.
For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly;
they will be put to shame, for God has rejected them.
- ⁶ O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!
When God restores the fortunes of his people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, you call us out to follow you; there are so many who want to call us away from your wisdom and take us on another path in an effort to corrupt our values, faith, and believe. There is temptation all around us, all the time. Those who have no knowledge of who you are and what glorious signs of wonder you've done already laugh at us because they don't understand. For your faithful servants all will be restored with words and songs of lament replaced by words, action and songs rejoicing in your holy name. In the name of the risen Christ amen.

PRAYER POINTS OF THANKS AND PRAISE

- Thank you for giving me purpose in my daily life
- Thank you for the gift of the bread and wine of salvation



- Thank you for all the beauty of life which surrounds me-the sounds of birds, the colours in the wings of butterflies, the patterns in the clouds.
- Thank you for the hope, which is found in young people, growth in faith, a commitment to the future of St Ninian's
- I give you praise for the courage to take new steps in making connections in the community.
- I give you praise for the joy and lifting of the spirit when energy is low and time is limited
- I give you praise for the helpful work and caring attitude of the students and teachers at Radford College
- I give you praise for letting us see youth from a different perspective.

PRAYER POINTS FOR PRAYER OF CONFESSION

- For the times I have been unwilling to give to others – forgive me
- For not being responsive to your love and grace – forgive me
- For being selfish and not motivated to love or care for others - forgive me
- For allowing myself to be tempted to go astray – forgive me

WORDS OF GRACE

In the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom; for God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Hear then Christ's word of grace to us: 'Your sins are forgiven.' Amen

REFLECTION

The well-known naturalist from the 1800s Charles Darwin approached the question of the existence of God through the lens of scientific enquiry rather than a faith and belief viewpoint. 1859 he offered the idea that evolution is a derivative of the natural selection process. Whilst he didn't explicitly say that God didn't exist his emphasis was on the natural processes as the mechanism of all life.

It wasn't until his later writings and in particular 'The Descent of Man,' that he explored the implications of his theories on morality and the human condition (sin) without giving up on the ambiguity of there being a divine God. Due to his early upbringing as an Anglican and his wife's faith he grappled with the conflict of faith and science fully aware of the fact that his discoveries would create enormously difficult questions for the church to answer. While at a personal level he expressed doubts about the traditional views of God, his philosophical outlook was more significant, advocating for a scientific approach to understanding existence rather than outright atheism. Whilst he acknowledged life was complex, he left the door open on the question of whether God could exist alongside the laws of nature.

Psalm 53 is a reflection on the human condition (sin) with a focus on themes of idiocy, sin, and a longing to be in a restored relationship with God. The psalm's opening with a stark declaration that the *'fool says in his heart, there is no God'* resonates deeply within both the historical and modern contexts of faith and belief; one which Darwin faced for many years before writing his book. We are challenged to consider the implications of denying God's authority and the moral chaos that often follows. If we allow ourselves to deny the existence of God as Creator, the road which leads to living outside of God's expectation of us and ours of God is more easily one of corruption and foolishness.

The portrayal of the 'fool' serves as a cautionary reminder that rejecting God leads to a distortion of reality. It's a warning against the consequences of disbelief that can influence and tempt the heart, not only at the individual level, but also within the social framework in our communities resulting in conflicting perspectives of how we 'should/ought' to live together harmoniously. Amidst this darkness, the author of the psalm, emphasises that God looks at us from the heavens and witnesses how well we're going and equally how well we're not going, thus clearly demonstrating to us God's concern for God's creation and God's continual presence with us.

There is an obvious longing for restoration, and we hear it loud and clear in the cry for salvation for Israel in verse 6: *"⁶O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion When God restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad."* This yearning reflects the hope that comes from recognising both individual and collective sinfulness while at the same time acknowledging God is only too willing to intervene – if asked. Zion, as a symbol of God's presence and naturally God's authority, becomes central in our hope for deliverance. In the psalm we also hear a deeply held expression that God will restore the fortunes of those who have chosen to follow God, bringing about a deep sense of joy and communal celebration that follows our salvation through the death and resurrection of God's only Son Jesus Christ.

Psalm 53 encourages us to confront or perhaps take responsibility for our propensity to drift away from God and the clarity found in embracing our faith. We are challenged to examine our lives for areas where we may stray off the path and move into places of disbelief or unfaithfulness. Recognising this and taking the necessary steps to restore our relationship with God is the first move to make – Jesus as the compassionate Shepherd is always ready and waiting for every lost sheep. Ultimately, psalm 53 offers us reassurance that despite our continuing propensity to turn our faces away from God, God remains steadfast, always pursuing restoration and salvation for God's beloved Created people – even if your name is Charles Darwin. We are invited to anticipate and rejoice in the hope of redemption that exceeds our circumstances, with joyfulness and peace being firmly placed in the promise of God's willingness to be active in our lives rather than depending on our self-made joy, peace and hope for eternal life coming wholly from within.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER POINTS

Pray for:

- health to be restored to those who are unwell in mind, body and spirit
- God's mission and ministry at St Ninian's to continue to grow and develop
- The Spirit to intervene in our lives and give us the courage to do what we're being called to do.
- Peace around the world where wars, violence, oppression, hunger, are the things that come between God and God's people
- The students and teachers at Radford College and schools in general, may their lives be enriched by God's presence as they make their way in the world.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtT1pvzwHsk>

