



St Andrew
STAPLEFORD

George Herbert
Poet & priest



LOVE BADE ME WELCOME

the poetry of George Herbert

14, 21 January & 4, 11 February

George Herbert (1593-1633)

Many people know of George Herbert, if they know of him at all, because of his popular and inspiring Christian hymns – *Let all the world, in every corner sing*, *Teach me my God and King*, and *King of Glory, King of Peace*. The words are three poems from his collection *The Temple*, from which our poems in this sermon series are also taken.

Herbert was born on 3 April 1593 in Montgomery in Wales, a child of Richard and his wife Magdalene. His grandfather was Sir Edward Herbert, Constable of Montgomery Castle. The family moved to Oxford and then to London where George attended Westminster School. He went on to Cambridge University where he started writing poetry and later he composed devotional poems. In 1624 he was a Member of Parliament but that was short lived. As public orator he came into contact with the King and Court. He was ordained a deacon and became rector of Llandinam in his native county, and was later a Canon of Lincoln Cathedral. On 5 March 1629 he married Jane Danvers.

Herbert struggled for most of his life with conflicting desires. He was a gifted scholar who shone at school and university, and a glittering political career seemed to beckon. But he was also conscious of a calling to ordination. His inner turmoil seems to have inspired much of his poetry.

It was not until 1630, at the age of 36, after considerable soul searching, that he resolved his innermost doubts. He gave up any aspirations to public life, embraced the priesthood and accepted the living of the small, insignificant parish of Fuggleston-cum-Bemerton in Wiltshire. Here he found inner peace at last, serving God and the local community, and writing *The Country Parson, His Character and Rule of Holy Life* and here too his poetic talent was able to flourish. This tranquillity lasted for only three years, brought to an end by his early death just short of his 40th birthday.

*Information from westminster-abbey.org and georgeherbert.org.uk,
accessed 15 December 2023*

Redemption

Having been tenant long to a rich Lord,

Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,

And make a suit unto him, to afford

A new small-rented lease, and cancel th' old.

In heaven at his manour I him sought:

They told me there, that he was lately gone

About some land, which he had dearly bought

Long since on earth, to take possession.

I straight return'd, and knowing his great birth,

Sought him accordingly in great resorts;

In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts:

At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth

Of thieves and murderers: there I him espied,

*Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, and died.*

Revelation 5.1-10

5 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?' ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying:

'You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.'

Matthew 8.5-13

⁵ When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶ ‘Lord,’ he said, ‘my servant lies at home paralysed, suffering terribly.’

⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘Shall I come and heal him?’

⁸ The centurion replied, ‘Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, “Go,” and he goes; and that one, “Come,” and he comes. I say to my servant, “Do this,” and he does it.’

¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, ‘Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹ I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.’ And his servant was healed at that moment.

Jesu

*JESU is in my heart, his sacred name
Is deeply carved there: but th'other week
A great affliction broke the little frame,
Ev'n all to pieces: which I went to seek:
And first I found the corner, where was J,
After, where ES, and next where U was graved,
When I had got these parcels, instantly
I sat me down to spell them, and perceived
That to my broken heart he was I ease you,
And to the whole is J E S U.*

There is no "J" in the Latin alphabet. "I" is used instead. On public buildings you may see "IVSTICE." The listing of the poems in the back of the 1633 edition of *The Temple* has no "J." All "J" and "I" poems are alphabetical under "I." George Herbert takes this convention and in the second last line of the poem sees "Jesu," as "IESU" or "I ease you".

Revelation 19.6-10

⁶ Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

‘Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear.’

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

⁹ Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’

¹⁰ At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.’

Matthew 4.12-17

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – ¹⁴ to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ ‘Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles –

¹⁶ the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.’

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’

Judgement

*Almighty Judge, how shall poore wretches brook
Thy dreadfull look,
Able a heart of iron to appall,
When thou shalt call
For ev'ry mans peculiar book?*

*What others mean to do, I know not well,
Yet I heare tell,
That some will turn thee to some leaves therein
So void of sinne,
That they in merit shall excell.*

*But I resolve, when thou shalt call for mine,
That to decline,
And thrust a Testament into thy hand:
Let that be scann'd.
There thou shalt finde my faults are thine.*

Colossians 1.15-20

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Luke 8.26-35

²⁶ They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. ²⁷ When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!' ²⁹ For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

³⁰ Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?'

'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him. ³¹ And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

³² A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. ³³ When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴ When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, ³⁵ and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

Love (3)

*Love badē me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guiltie of dust and sinne.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lack'd any thing.*

*A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
 I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?*

*Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
 My deare, then I will serve.
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.*

2 Corinthians 4.3-6

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Mark 9.2-8

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

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Memorial window to George Herbert, St George's Chapel, Westminster Abbey