

Sunday Service ~ June 7, 2026

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer

Good morning and welcome to Swansea/Charlestown Presbyterian Church, my name is Audric and I'm one of the ministers here.

Today I'm reminded how, like sheep, we have been called into the shepherd's fold. As God gathers us here today, we are drawn in as God's people. Brought into the safety. The protection of the good shepherd himself. Who protects us, feeds us and shelters us. In his safety. As we take his invitation of Grace and are brought in from the threat of sin and destruction.

So let's come before our good shepherd, knowing who he is and what we've done.

Let's pray.

Prayer.

Our God and good and faithful Shepherd,

We bow before You not because we are worthy, but because You have made a way for wandering sheep to draw near. And wander we have. We have despised the shepherd's voice, turning aside to seek our own pasture, trusting our own sense of the way though it has led us into thorns and darkness. We have been anxious as though we had no shepherd, and distracted as though Your Word had nothing to say to us. We confess that there is in us a persistent and native inclination away from You. We do not excuse it. We bring it, with shame, to Your feet.

And yet, what Shepherd we have, who does not abandon the straying flock? You are not a shepherd who tends us only when we are close at hand. You are the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. In the fullness of time You took on flesh, bore the wolf's full fury, and entered the valley of the shadow of death on our behalf. You knew Your sheep before the foundation of the world and have called each one by name, not by merit, but by sovereign and inexhaustible grace.

We praise You that You lead us and do not merely point the way. That when we lie down in green pastures it is Your hand that has brought us there, and when we drink of quiet waters it is Your care that knew our thirst before we named it. You restore the soul not because it has earned restoration, but because Your name is Mercy and Your name is Faithfulness.

So lead us still, Lord. Let us not affirm Your shepherdhood on the Lord's Day and live as orphans the rest of the week. Be our shepherd in our homes and our work, in our fears and our failures, in the small disciplines of daily godliness.

To the Great Shepherd of the sheep, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, be glory and honor now and unto the ages of ages.

Amen.

Song – When I Survey

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

1 When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.
2 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

3 See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?
4 Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Bible Reading – Daniel Daniel 8:1-14 (NIV)

In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me. ²In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susain the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal. ³I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. ⁴I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great.

⁵As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. ⁶It came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage. ⁷I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it; the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power. ⁸The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.

⁹Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. ¹⁰It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. ¹¹It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord; it took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down. ¹²Because of rebellion, the Lord's people^[a] and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

¹³Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people?"

¹⁴He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."

Announcements

Focus for the month: Training No athlete shows up to the game without putting in the work beforehand. The same is true for the Christian life. Growth in Christ does not happen by accident. It happens through training, through the deliberate and repeated practice of putting yourself in the path of God's grace.

With that in mind, we have a number of trainings coming up in the weeks ahead covering prayer, Bible reading, and AV. Each one is an opportunity to sharpen the ways you already serve, or to step into an area where you have never served before.

So ask yourself honestly: how are you equipping yourself to serve faithfully and effectively? Could you benefit from attending one of these? Sharpening how we serve is not just about getting better at a task. It is about positioning ourselves to experience more of God's grace, and to be a means of that grace for the people around us. That happens best in community, and it happens best when we come prepared.

Steve's leave. Steve returns from leave in the middle of the week. Please be patient if you are waiting a reply from him as there will be many pending tasks for him to return to. In the mean time, if there are any pressing pastoral issues, please forward them to Audric or the elders this week.

Discover Course One of the great privileges of the local church is getting to set a table where people who are searching can come and hear the Gospel. Jannah is forming a team to run an evangelistic course over 4 to 5 weeks in the coming months, and we would love for you to be part of it. This is a space designed for people who are exploring faith, full of honest questions and genuine curiosity. A place where the Gospel can be heard clearly, and where those searching have the room to ask what they are actually wondering. It is a simple and beautiful thing to be part of. If serving on this team is something you feel drawn to, please reach out to Audric or Jannah this week. We would love to hear from you.

Pastoral Prayer

Pray for Christians in Eritrea Sovereign Lord, we grieve with your church in Eritrea, where believers are imprisoned for their faith, where unregistered churches are shut down and pastors disappear into detention without trial. The cost of following Jesus there is not abstract. It is a prison cell, a family separated, a life shrunk to survival. Sustain those who suffer, and remind them in the darkness that you are the God who sees. We praise you that no dictatorship has ever succeeded in burying what you have determined to grow. Strengthen your church in Eritrea, and bring many more to faith in the One worth suffering for.

Pray for the Discover Course Gracious God, we give thanks for Jannah and the team forming around this evangelistic course. We pray for those who will walk through the door still searching, still questioning, still unsure. May they hear the Gospel with clarity and feel the welcome of your people with warmth. Grant the team wisdom in how they listen, how they speak, and how they love. And Lord, would you do what only you can do, and bring many to genuine, lasting faith in Jesus.

Pray for the Parsons Heavenly Father, we lift before you the Parsons and the work you have called them to. We praise you for the three groups coming from America to assist with outreach in July, and for the generosity of those who give their time to serve. We pray for wisdom as they plan, and that many would attend and hear the Gospel. We pray for Sandra as she oversees the warehouse clearout, that you would grant her strength, wisdom, and the grace to carry a demanding season well. And we pray for Steven as he travels to Toronto for the global TEAM

gathering, that the conversations would be honest and fruitful, and that what is aligned there would bear fruit in missionaries better supported and more effective in making disciples across the world.

Pray for our Bible Study Leaders Lord, we give thanks for those who open your word with our small groups week after week. We pray that they would lead not merely as teachers but as shepherds, modelling what it looks like to walk with Jesus, and caring for those in their groups with genuine pastoral tenderness. Guard them from discouragement, sustain them in their own walk with you, and may the studies they lead bear fruit that outlasts the room.

Pray for Steve Father, we pray for Steve as he returns from his time overseas. Grant him genuine rest and renewal, that he would be refreshed in body and spirit and ready to shepherd and serve with full strength. Restore what the travel has taken, and meet him in the quiet before the work begins again.

Bible Reading – Daniel 7:15-27 (NIV)

While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. ¹⁶ And I heard a man's voice from the Ulaicalling, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision."

¹⁷ As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "Son of man,"^[b] he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end."

¹⁸ While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet.

¹⁹ He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end."^[c] ²⁰ The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹ The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes is the first king. ²² The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power.

²³ "In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. ²⁴ He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. ²⁵ He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.

²⁶ "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."

²⁷ I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.

Song – Yet Not I But Christ Through Me

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

What gift of grace is Jesus, my Redeemer
There is no more for Heaven now to give
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom
My steadfast love, my deep and boundless
peace

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
For my life is wholly bound to His
Oh, how strange and divine, I can sing, "All
is mine"

Yet not I, but through Christ in me

The night is dark, but I am not forsaken
For by my side, the Savior, He will stay
I labor on in weakness and rejoicing
For in my need, His power is displayed

To this I hold, my Shepherd will defend me
Through the deepest valley, He will lead
Oh, the night has been won, and I shall
overcome

Yet not I, but through Christ in me

No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven
The future's sure, the price, it has been paid
For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon

And He was raised to overthrow the grave
To this I hold, my sin has been defeated
Jesus, now and ever is my plea
Oh, the chains are released, I can sing, "I am
free"

Yet not I, but through Christ in me
With every breath, I long to follow Jesus
For He has said that He will bring me home
And day by day, I know He will renew me

Until I stand with joy before the throne
To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
All the glory evermore to Him
When the race is complete, still my lips shall
repeat
"Yet not I, but through Christ in me"

Sermon – Daniel 8 – The Future Decided

Good morning. Let's pray.

Our heavenly and gracious Father, you are the one who unveils the truth to those you have given your grace. Would you drench us once more in your grace, that we might not only see but perceive, not only perceive but obey, transformed by the power of your word. Amen.

There was a moment not long ago when people in this country were queueing for petrol. Live maps on the news showing which servos had run out. People showing up with thousand-litre tanks. Updates on how many months of fuel we had left. Suggestions that employers would need to bring back work-from-home arrangements. Panic buying. Queues for electric cars stretching months long. And somewhere in the middle of it all, someone, probably, googled the price of a horse.

It sounds almost funny. But it wasn't, was it? Because underneath the queues and the maps and the panic buying was something more serious. The feeling that something we had just assumed would always be there might not be.

It's the moment the illusion of stability cracks. What is it you're actually counting on right now? When you picture next year going okay, what are you picturing? Your health holding. Your job. Your country staying stable enough. Your family not falling apart. We build the whole architecture of our lives on these things, and most of the time, they hold. Most of the time we don't notice we're doing it. Until they don't.

And that's exactly where we find Daniel. Often we think of his promotions, leader of all the satraps, given great responsibility, God blessing him in Babylon. But have we forgotten what Daniel actually is? He's a captive. He's not there by choice. He's living inside a foreign empire, watching the powers around him do whatever they want: rise, war, conquer, destroy. He's already been given visions of wicked kingdoms rising and falling, and now he faces another one. Harder than the last. So disturbing it will leave him physically ill. And yet what he's given in this vision is the one thing we're all quietly looking for. Not an escape from hard times. Not a guarantee that the petrol prices won't rise again. But the knowledge that someone has already decided how this ends.

In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me. In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal.

We find ourselves two years later from the vision in the previous chapter. Daniel sees himself in Susa, in the province of Elam. Daniel is in Babylon, but he sees himself in another city, the secondary capital of Babylon, which would become the heartland of the Persian Empire about to replace it. Even in the geography of Daniel's vision, something is shifting. The centre of power is already moving east. Babylon is on its way out before the first blow is struck.

I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great. As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. It came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage. I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it; the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power. The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.

We're not Daniel, who had a gift for interpreting visions. But making sense of this is much easier when we're reading from the other side of history. We know exactly which kingdoms came after Babylon. As verse 20 tells us: the two-horned ram represents the kings of Media and Persia, one horn higher than the other suggesting Persian dominance. The ram is spreading, north, west, south, unconquerable, until the goat arrives moving with such blitzkrieg speed it doesn't even seem to touch the ground, hammering and ploughing through everything in its path. The goat's great horn, as verse 21 interprets it, is the first king of Greece: Alexander the Great.

Made king at twenty, within ten years Alexander had conquered a vast swathe of Europe and the Middle East, invading at incredible speed. Doesn't that sound much like the goat? In ten years, he's conquered the world. But global domination is not all it's cracked up to be. At the young age of thirty-two, Alexander dies from an unknown sickness, and an unstoppable empire spends the next twenty years tearing itself apart into four segments, the Diadochi, four of Alexander's generals each taking a portion of the kingdom. Hence verse 8, where the horn is broken off and in its place four prominent horns grow up toward the four winds of heaven.

It's striking, the way the vision unravels future historical moments. God's people are living in a turbulent and extended stretch of history. Just in these few verses, we're covering two centuries of empire, rise, conquest, and collapse. Daniel would have had no idea how many years this would span, but he would know that these kingdoms smashing against each other would take much time. And the key point is this: even Alexander, who grew his kingdom so quickly, can die so quickly and have everything fall apart. The vision paints a picture where God decides who rises and who falls.

There's a small taste of this more recently in the Nuremberg trials of 1946. The executions of the Nazi leaders were carried out, and their remains were delivered to a Munich crematorium. That same night the ashes were driven out into the Bavarian countryside in the rain and tipped into a muddy ditch.

So God decides who falls: Alexander, the Nazis, every empire that ever thought it was permanent. But if you're Daniel, if you're one of God's people living inside one of these collapsing kingdoms, knowing that empires fall doesn't actually answer your most pressing question. Your question isn't who. It's when. How long do we have to live inside this? How long before it ends? And God answers that too.

Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord; it took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down. Because of rebellion, the Lord's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

Another horn. Another king: Antiochus the Fourth, who starts small, rising from one of those four divided kingdoms, four hundred years later. We know it is him because of how he grew his kingdom: conquering Egypt twice, spreading east, then invading the Beautiful Land. And then the biggest clue, verses 11 and 12, he stops the worship of Israel. At this point Israel had restored the temple, but Antiochus looted it, removed the high priest and replaced him with someone politically convenient. The high priesthood of Israel became a political appointment rather than a representative of God to his people. He slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews, and worst of all, created a forced paganisation program, a systematic attempt to erase Jewish faith entirely and replace it with pagan worship by force. Overseers were sent throughout Israel: if a scroll of the Torah was found, or a child was circumcised, they were put to death. And in 167 BC, a heathen altar was built in the temple of Jerusalem where a sacrifice was offered to Zeus.

A horrifying reality behind a horrifying vision. This is why, out of sheer horror at what is to come, Daniel hears this in verse 13:

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled, the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people?" He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."

The cry of Psalm 13: how long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? God answers the angel's cry not with comfort but with a number. 2,300 evenings and mornings. It's finite. It has an end. What his people were walking through was not outside his will. It was within it.

Isaac Newton, the very one who explained gravity and an avid Christian, held that a day is like a year to the Lord, and using that calculation, predicted the end of this tribulation would come

around the year 2060. People have tried for centuries to calculate God's timing. The point isn't that we can decode it. The point is that God has already set it. It's not open-ended. It's finite. God decides the time. He has decided it will go no longer than he intends, and that is a great hope for us as Christians. Whatever we're going through, whatever upheaval we're experiencing, it is not going on for any longer than God has intended. Rather than being fearful that God has allowed this, isn't it comforting that God has decided its time? Even while we walk through trouble and tribulation, God has not forgotten us.

But there's still one more question underneath all of this, and it's the one that really matters. Not just when does it end, but how. How does it end for God's people? What is actually waiting on the other side of all this upheaval? And for that, God doesn't just send a number. He sends a messenger.

While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and trying to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a man. And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision." As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end." While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet. He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end."

What better way to receive an interpretation than from one of God's own messengers, the angel Gabriel. And he uses a title we are familiar with. In Daniel 7, "Son of Man" is the title of the heavenly figure who approaches God's throne, the one who receives the eternal kingdom. It becomes Jesus' favourite title for himself. But here in chapter 8, Gabriel uses it differently, almost in contrast. Son of man, just a human, frail, mortal, face to the ground. That's Daniel. And maybe that's us. While Daniel is a mere man, God is the one who decides the end.

In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power. The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future. I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.

Daniel is appalled. Exhausted. He goes back to the king's business, not because the vision was encouraging, it wasn't, it was terrifying, but because he has seen something that changes everything. God has already decided the who, the when, and the end. That doesn't make the hard things easy, but it means the hard things are not the final word. The vision isn't given to Daniel so he can escape the exile. He stays in it. He serves in it. But he serves differently, because he knows something the kings around him don't: that God has already decided how this ends. And that is not just Daniel's situation. That is ours. We are not so different from him, living inside an empire that is not our home, watching the powers of the world do whatever they want, wondering if the ground underneath us is as solid as we thought. But God has decided our end too. Not just the end of wicked kingdoms. Yours. Mine.

So we can do what Daniel did: go back to the king's business, live in the exile, serve in it, not because it's easy, but because we are not waiting to see how this turns out. We already know. We

are exiles, but we are exiles with hope. And that changes everything about how you walk out of here today.

What Daniel couldn't fully see, we can. He had a number, 2,300 evenings and mornings. But we have a name. Verse 25 tells us Antiochus will take his stand against the Prince of Princes and be destroyed, not by human power. That's the one no empire can kill. That's Jesus.

You may feel like an exile, a saint living in a wicked world, and you very well may be. But you are not a ditch in the rain. You are not trampled nor forgotten. God is giving you life, full and unending, with him. That is the greater end we are living toward, and it is not uncertain. It's not dependent on whether petrol prices will ever go down, or your health holds, or the ground stays steady. It was decided before you were born, and secured by someone who walked into the exile himself and came out the other side.

So if you are in Christ today, your end is not in question. It has been decided.

My previous senior minister had a question he'd ask people when he met them: do you think you'll go to heaven when you die? And people would give him all kinds of answers. I hope so. I pay my taxes and care for my family. Or: I don't know, probably, I go to church on Sundays and I believe in God. Or even: I trust in Jesus and I'm a pretty good person, so hopefully. People hope, they do good things, but so much of it keeps them in uncertainty. They aren't sure of what God has decided for them.

But we can be sure. We can have certainty that God will bring us home on the final day. Because when God decided to put Jesus up on the cross, it was then that he decided that anyone, anyone, who believes in him would not perish but have eternal life. So when someone asks you if you'll go to heaven when you die, you can say yes. Not because it is up to you, but because it is up to the perfect work of Christ that you have put your faith in. God has decided.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to be sure of the end that you have for us, and that in Jesus that end might mean that one day we would share eternity with you. So when we face trials, hardships, and evil, we might do so upright and righteous, knowing that you will hold us to the very end. Amen.

Song – Holy Holy Holy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bk28-xyK4>

1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.

Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

2. Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore thee,

Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea.

Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before thee,

Who was and is and evermore shall be.

3. Holy, Holy, Holy! though the darkness hide thee,

Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,

Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee, Perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.

4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth, and sky, and sea;

Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Benediction

Go now into a world of rising powers and restless seas, knowing that the Ancient of Days has never left his throne. The Son of Man has received his kingdom and no beast, no empire, no darkness has ever taken it from him. The court has sat, the judgment is sure, and you are held by the one whose dominion shall not pass away. Amen.