

East Durham Methodist Circuit:
On-line Service for 25th April 2021

Prepared by Peter Walsham, Ashleigh Pritchard and Adele Stockton

Theme: Jesus the Good Shepherd

Welcome and call to worship:

From 1 Peter Ch.5 vs.2:

“Be shepherds of God’s flock and take care of it willingly. Do your work, not for mere pay, but from a real desire to serve. Do not try to rule over those who have been put in your care, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

Let us come to worship our one true Shepherd, may His Spirit communicate with our spirit in Faith, Hope and Love as we give Him the praise of our whole being. **Amen**

Hymn: King of Kings, Majesty Jarrod Cooper StF 1404

1. King of kings, majesty,
God of Heaven living in me,
gentle Saviour, closest friend,
strong deliverer, beginning and end,
all within me falls at your throne.

**Your majesty, I can but bow,
I lay my all before you now.
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve your majesty.**

2. Earth and Heaven worship you,
love eternal, faithful and true,
who bought the nations, ransomed
souls,
brought this sinner near to your throne;
all within me cries out in praise.

Your majesty.. (Sing twice)

Prayers of adoration and confession:

Let us offer our praise to God.

Creator, we adore You. All creation reflects Your glory.

You have made women, men, girls and boys in your image, You welcome those who are vulnerable with open arms of compassionate acceptance.

Redeemer, we adore You. All creation is reconciled in You.

When the weak and broken lie bruised and discarded, You challenge the complacent, revealing the truth behind our lies and invite the wounded to Your feast of life.

Sustainer, we adore You. All creation is inspired by you.

You breathe life into places of deathly fear, You increase our understanding of things that are hard to comprehend and draw us into Your dance of loving joy.

God, three in one, all creation sings of your great deeds.

Lord, we are sorry that we have not always lived in ways that mirror God's love for us and everyone around us. There have been times when our ignorance and prejudice has caused us to judge others and think they are less important or whole than ourselves.

We have not always lived as people who are assured of our place in God's heart. There are times when we have despaired and have turned away from God's promises, instead of trusting that God will provide for us.

We have not always lived as disciples of Jesus. There are times when the routes to power and wealth have been more attractive to us than roads to peace, justice and tolerance, and as a result we have strayed from our true path.

We have not always lived as people of the Resurrection. There are times when we have seen the world only as a place of threat and brokenness and forget God's creative Genius.

We reflect on our actions, thoughts and words that have hurt others and damaged the world we live in. We hope that with Your endless love and support we can transform our lives to reflect God's love for all. **Amen**

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus who taught us to say:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done - on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever. **Amen****

Hymn: As the deer pants for the water Martin Nystrom StF 27

1. As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.
You alone are my strength my shield.
To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.

2. You're my friend and you are my brother even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other so much more than anything.
You alone are my strength my shield.
To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.

3. As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.
You alone are my strength my shield.
To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.

Reading: Psalm 23: The Divine Shepherd

New International Version

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

Reading: John 10: 11-18 Jesus the Good Shepherd New International Version

¹ "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers."

⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Reflection: from Lectionary Reflections by Jane Williams (SPCK)

Jesus describes His ministry as that of a good shepherd. The sheep come to know the voice of the shepherd because it is the voice that they have learned to associate with care, safety, warmth and food. In a crisis they will trust the shepherd because he has proved himself trustworthy before, in providing for their basic needs.

The sheep would not have come to trust the shepherd if the shepherd only spoke words to the sheep. They will only trust and love the shepherd because his words transcend into practical actions that show the total care he has for the sheep.

This thought is reflected in the words recorded in the first letter of John Ch.3.
“Let us love not in word or speech but in love and action.”

Prayers of Intercession:

Almighty God, we bring our concerns to you in prayer.

We pray for your world-wide church, asking especially for your blessing as countless of your people continue to find new ways to worship in the current emergency and work out how they can safely re-open premises as we emerge out of lockdown.

We pray for your world. We bring before you our concerns about situations in places such as Northern Ireland where there is unrest and war-torn countries where people are in fear of their lives every day and are being persecuted because of their faith, plus other places which may not currently be in the news headlines but are no less important.

We pray for world leaders, that they may be inspired less by parochial matters than wider ones. We pray, too, for our own country, the Prime Minister and Cabinet Members, some of whom carry a heavy responsibility for taking the country forward at this difficult time.

We remember, too, the places in which we live, work and see our families and friends. Even now, in this period when it's harder to interact socially face-to-face, we ask your blessing on our efforts to care for those in need. May we prayerfully support those public bodies who are leading the provision of help in our own localities.

We remember in our prayers those who are in poor physical or mental health and give thanks to those who look after them.

We remember those suffering in other ways, especially those who mourn the deaths of family members and friends from Covid-19.

And we pray for ourselves. we pray that we shall develop our spiritual selves and learn always to serve our communities better.

In the name of Jesus.

Amen

Hymn: The Lord's my Shepherd

Stuart Townend

StF 1030

1. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

**And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.**

2. He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights. **And I will trust...**

3. And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know. **And I will trust...**

Message:

Both our Bible readings today are written in descriptive and symbolic language. Our Old Testament lesson is King David's reassuring Psalm, 'The Lord's my shepherd', known and loved by many, and perhaps the most famous of all the psalms. Here David describes God as a 'Good Shepherd' and this picture of God has given peace and hope to many people in times of trouble and need.

Then, our opening statement in our Gospel reading from John is Jesus telling us, "I am the Good Shepherd." He uses the symbol of a good shepherd to paint a picture of His nature and character.

And then, if we take it to the next level, one of the last things the risen Jesus said to Simon Peter, as recorded in John's Gospel Ch.21, was "Feed my sheep, take care of my lambs." The great commission to go out into the world and seek the lost and save the fallen with the Gospel message of Christ's salvation available to everyone who believes in Him, is symbolically proclaimed by Jesus.

Jesus is the 'Good Shepherd'.

I thought we might look at the differences between a 'Good Shepherd' and a 'Bad Shepherd', because if Jesus symbolises the Good Shepherd, then Satan must symbolise the opposite, the 'Bad Shepherd'. So let us compare the two.

In verse two of Psalm 23, David tells us the Good Shepherd (the Lord), makes me lie down in green pastures and he leads me beside the still waters, restoring my soul. Here, the good shepherd gives his flock nourishment and rest, helping to provide energy and sustenance for the body, mind and soul of the individual.

Then, in John, chapter 10, verse 11, Jesus tells us, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Here Jesus is speaking of His sacrificial death in order to protect His flock, the flock being you and I.

This links in with Psalm 23 vs. 5-6 where David tries to describe the future heaven and eternal life, as he writes, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil and my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

In contrast, all Satan can offer is a life in Hell. In Mark Ch.9 vs.42, we read this: "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, where the fire never goes out!"

Jesus makes it clear here that a life of sin, following Satan's persuasive ways will end in nothing but a burning hell.

Satan cannot protect anyone as Jesus reminds us in our Gospel reading, John Ch.10 vs.12. "The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep, so when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. The man runs away because he cares nothing for the sheep.

Unlike the Good Shepherd, described by David, in Psalm 23. vs.4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me."

Satan hasn't got a rod of power nor a staff of faith found in a loving Father. Satan has no one, except his own cunning and persuasive power. Like a troublesome weed, he can only plant his evil thoughts in us and hope they will take root and overcome the goodness which everyone is born with. At the mention of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, he runs away as the coward he truly is.

How does this relate to us today?

Well in John Ch.21. vs.19, after Jesus has asked Peter three times to feed His sheep, he ends the conversation by saying two profound words, "Follow Me!" He asks Peter to follow him as a good shepherd to the people, and this also applies to you and me!

Again, as we turn to our passage from John Ch.10. vs.16, for the last time today, we read these words from Jesus, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen and I must bring them in also." You and I, in following Jesus, must search for the sheep who are lost, outside the Christian Faith, muddling along, trying to find good pasture and sound restful peace for their soul.

You and I have a responsibility to lead these lost sheep back into the arms of the great, Good Shepherd. We must confront those who are being led astray by Satan, try our best to convince those who are tempted by Satan's cheap and easy values to follow, that there is a better, more fulfilling and good way to take.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew Ch.7 vs.13. Jesus asks this of each and every one of us: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Let's make it our goal in life to seek out those who are entering the wide gate and broad road to hell and destruction and turn them around and help them through the small gate and more difficult narrow road, because in so doing, we shall be like the Good Shepherd taking care of his sheep, until finally, we can all claim the final verse to Psalm 23, "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord, forever."
Amen

Hymn: There is a Redeemer Keith Green StF 544

There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own son,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One.

**Thank you, O my Father, for giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit, till the work on earth is done.**

Jesus my Redeemer, name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, O for sinners slain.

Thank you, O my Father...

When I stand in glory, I will see His face,
And there I'll serve my King forever, in that holy place.

Thank you, O my Father...

Blessing: Hebrews Ch.13 vs.20

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us, that which is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be all glory for ever and ever.

Amen