



Fourth Sunday in Easter

11th May 2025

Be thou a bright flame before me,
Be thou a guiding star above me,
Be thou a smooth path below me,
Be thou a kindly shepherd behind me,
Today - tonight - and for ever

Columba (?521-597) Irish monk and missionary in Scotland

Hymn

Praise the Lord! ye heavens adore him;
praise him angels in the height;
sun and moon, rejoice before him;
praise him, all ye stars of light.
Praise the Lord! for he hath spoken;
worlds his mighty voice obeyed;
laws which never shall be broken
for their guidance he hath made.

Praise the Lord! for he is glorious;
never shall his promise fail;
God hath made his saints victorious;
sin and death shall not prevail.
Praise the God of our salvation!
Hosts on high, his power proclaim;
heaven and earth, and all creation,
laud and magnify his Name

Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed for us.
Let us therefore rejoice by putting away all malice and evil
and confessing our sins with a sincere and true heart.

Prayers of Penitence

Lord Jesus, you suffered a cruel death on the cross for
our redemption,
yet we have forgotten your pain
and stayed in the realm of the evil you defeated.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you were raised from death to bring us new life,
yet we have preferred the comfort of the familiar,
and the empty promises of a sinful world.
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you have ascended to your Father and our Father,
your God and our God;
plead there at the right hand of God
for our forgiveness and entry into the fullness of his presence.
Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

May the God of love and power
+ forgive you and free you from your sins,
heal and strengthen you by his Spirit,
and raise you to new life in Christ our Lord.
Amen

Gloria in Excelsis

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

The Collect

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

A reading from the New Testament
Acts 9. 36-end

36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. 37 At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." 39 So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40 Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. 41 He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. 42 This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Psalm 23

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.

The Epistle
Revelation 7. 9-end

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

11 And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honour
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” 14 I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 For this reason they are before the throne of God,
and worship him day and night within his temple,
and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them,
nor any scorching heat;

17 for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Hymn

How sweet the Name of Jesus
sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his
wounds,
and drives away his fear.

Dear Name, the rock on which I
build,
my shield and hiding-place,
my never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace!

Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

It makes the wounded spirit
whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.

Jesus! my Shepherd, Brother,
Friend,
my Prophet, Priest and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my
End,
accept the praise I bring.

Till then I would thy love
proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy Name
refresh my soul in death!

Gospel Reading
John 10. 22-30

Alleluia Alleluia

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord.
I know them, and they follow me.
Alleluia

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John
Glory to you O Lord.

22 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 24 So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; 26 but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. 30 The Father and I are one."

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Reflection

This Sunday's readings throw us into a wonderful mix of the past, present, and future. In each the focus is the church in the widest sense of that word – ecclesia – 'to call out'. They are readings which force us to juggle with concepts of the type that you grasp for a moment, and which then seem to 'slip through your fingers'. They are hard to hold but the very glimpse of them confirms their existence and draws you on.

Acts is written by Luke, the only gentile writer of the Bible and described as a physician. No wonder the account of Dorcas has interest to him. She is the only woman in the New Testament to be described as *mathetria* the feminine form of 'disciple'. From this account can see the 'church' emerging as a well-organised body of those who have responded to the message of Jesus. A network of women appears to have been established using their skills to clothe the poor and perhaps even selling items to contribute some income. They were followers of 'The Way' of Jesus, and as Paul's letters confirm, widows were distinguished within Christian communities (1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy).

It is typical of Luke to pay attention to women in his accounts and to pay many women the compliment of a personal existence by naming them. Dorcas is a needlewoman (some of us may remember the 'Dorcas' brand of needles and pins, ultrafine and would not mark or rust).

Dorcas' death appears to be a natural death, she became ill and died. Yet the friends around her send for Peter. She was obviously well known and loved; they show him the things she had made. This is such a homely detail and is touching. Do we not keep items or objects? It is not silly or irrelevant to be touched by such objects, simple things that hold memory. I have a small handbag of my mother's, which, when I use it, even the smell evokes memory, the hanky, the "sweet in case I cough" ...

Luke is careful in what he writes. He does not say they called Peter so he might revive her or that Peter prayed for her. Luke emphasises that Dorcas is dead, Peter addresses a 'body' (soma) to speak his command, "Tabitha (Dorcas is the Greek for her name) get up!"

This is the past, the church forming itself in history, it has embraced a tradition and models itself on the healing actions of Elijah and Elisha, and especial on Jesus' actions. There is an echo between 'Tabitha' and *talitha* 'little girl' (Mark 6).

The reading from Revelation is what is to come, the church triumphing over history. Three times the word 'lamb' is used of Jesus, alluding to his sacrificial act, and yet this 'lamb' is also the Shepherd.

As for the present, Jesus' words and teaching around his statement, "I am the good shepherd" apply to us although much used in a pejorative sense to the religious leaders of his time. A consistent theme is 'my sheep'; they know his voice they are led by him and follow him. Here Jesus plainly says that those who recognise truth and goodness will react to him. Jesus has referred to himself as the GOOD Shepherd. In Greek there are two words for good *agathos* which simply describes the quality of a thing, and *kalos* which means not only good and useful, but a goodness that has a quality of loveliness, attractiveness, sympathy and kindness, alongside a strength and power.

They will recognise his voice and will respond. Whenever a person is confronted with Jesus, they make a choice. If they see nothing to desire, admire or love then they have put themselves outside that *kalos*; that love that would die for them. But if a person responds, however tentatively, but with a desire to seek and know more, they will be guided into more truth. It is only those who sense a need who find, because they are actively looking and will recognise the voice of the Shepherd.

Jesus is confronted by the Jews on the Feast of Dedication of the temple. His reply to their demands that he say whether he is the Messiah or not, speaks both of something that has always been (the Messianic promise) and something that is yet to be. He speaks about time and how the church will exist in time in a more complex way.

The Father has given him sheep who obey his voice and to whom he promises eternal life. This promise has still to be realised and must submit to the process of history as Jesus moves towards his death resurrection and ascension to share the Father's glory. When Jesus makes his self-disclosing statement "The Father and I are one." he is using one of the seven great 'I am' sayings. Seven in Hebrew thought is the number of completeness.

Jesus does not completely avoid their demand that he disclose his identity; he is doing so all the time but slowly, rather like 'seeds along the way' planting them where they will thrive. The first is "I am the bread of life." in chapter 6, the last, "I am the true vine", is in chapter 15. None is a political title, they remain enigmatic, grasped and lost and grasped again slowly revealing their truths.

The reading today ends with the most dramatic and most closely associated with kingship "The Father and I are one." What more do the authorities need! This is more than enough to condemn Jesus as a blasphemer. The very next sentence says they gathered stones to stone him for his supposed blasphemy against the oneness of God

Seemingly ordinary events can sometimes be the means by which we contact the divine, or whatever word we might use. These are liminal moments, points of transition, a boundary or threshold, from which we make progress in our spiritual lives. But always the response is ours.

What difference would it make to your relationship with Jesus to know that you are known by name?

That you can hear his voice through scripture and in the depths of your heart?

How will you respond to his voice?

Will you follow?

To follow we need to stay close.

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith
in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he was buried;
he was raised to life on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures;
afterwards he appeared to his followers,
and to all the apostles:
this we have received,
and this we believe.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for the church and for the world and thank God for his goodness

We pray to Jesus who is present with us to eternity.
Jesus, light of the world,
bring the light and peace of your gospel to the nations ...
Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us.
Jesus, bread of life,
give food to the hungry ...
and nourish us all with your word.
Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us.
Jesus, our way, our truth, our life,
be with us and all who follow you in the way ...
Deepen our appreciation of your truth
and fill us with your life.
Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us.
Jesus, Good Shepherd who gave your life for the sheep,
recover the straggler,
bind up the injured,
strengthen the sick
and lead the healthy and strong to new pastures.
Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us.
Jesus, the resurrection and the life,

we give you thanks for all who have lived and believed in you ...

Raise us with them to eternal life.

Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us,

May God the provider of green pastures and quiet waters be the peace in our hearts today

May Jesus our guide on mountain top and valley deep be the hope in our hearts today.

May the Spirit of truth and knowledge comforter and friend be the strength in our hearts today

May healing flow like a stream through our lives, sweeping away stones, debris, all that impedes,
leaving us refreshed, renewed, at peace.

May we learn to meet each day with hope, and expectation, may we relish each moment
as a gift from you.

May our days bring increasing freedom, as we change and grow in the knowledge of your love for us
and your presence with us.

May we become aware of peace in each day, of wholeness, of knowing that our lives are in your hands.

May each day bring us some joy, and blessing, and may we sense your goodness and mercy

following us all the days of our lives. Amen

These, and all the silent prayers of our hearts we offer to God.

Merciful father, we commit ourselves each other and all whom we love to your
mercy and protection. Accept these prayers for the sake of your son Jesus Christ our
Lord.

The God of peace,

who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,

that great shepherd of the sheep,

through the blood of the eternal covenant,

make you perfect in every good work to do his will,

working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight;

and the blessing of + God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

be with you and those for whom you pray

now and always

Amen

HYMN

I heard the voice of Jesus say,

"Come unto me and rest;

lay down, thou weary one, lay down

thy head upon my breast."

I came to Jesus as I was,

weary, and worn, and sad;

I found in him a resting place,

and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,

"Behold, I freely give

the living water; thirsty one,

stoop down and drink, and live."

I came to Jesus, and I drank

of that life-giving stream;

my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,

and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,

"I am this dark world's light;

look unto me, thy morn shall rise,

and all thy day be bright."

I looked to Jesus, and I found

in him my Star, my Sun;

and in that light of life I'll walk

till traveling days are done.

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