

Fourth Sunday in Easter

Good Shepherd Sunday

21 April 2024

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



The Greeting

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.
Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
He has given us new life and hope.
He has raised Jesus from the dead.
Alleluia. Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

HYMN

1 Thine for ever! God of love,
hear us from thy throne above;
thine for ever may we be
here and in eternity.

2 Thine for ever! Lord of life,
shield us through our earthly strife;
thou the Life, the Truth, the Way,
guide us to the realms of day.

3 Thine for ever! O how blest
they who find in thee their rest!
Saviour, guardian, heavenly friend,
O defend us to the end.

4 Thine for ever! Shepherd, keep
us thy frail and trembling sheep;
safe alone beneath thy care,
let us all thy goodness share.

5 Thine for ever! Thou our guide,
all our wants by thee supplied,
all our sins by thee forgiven,
lead us, Lord, from earth to heaven.

Invitation to confession

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

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

Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin

⁴ The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵ The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone."^[a]

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

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.

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

19 This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20 If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 24 The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

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

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.

Gospel Reading
John 10. 11-18

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.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep 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 are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you O Christ

Reflection

This reading from John’s Gospel brings into sharp focus the difference between the religious leaders who were meant to act as caring shepherds for the people and failed to do so and Jesus, who epitomises what a good shepherd should be. Jesus words were not lost on those leaders who heard them. He challenges their preoccupation with ‘rightness and order’ and their claim to ‘see’; to understand the Law. This only increased their desire to shut him up – which – if we read on, will culminate, with Jesus’ death by crucifixion.

The image of the Shepherd ran deep in their religious understanding. God is described as a Shepherd and Israel His flock. It is a positive image. Thus, Jesus’ words would have had immediate and significant resonance. In using the image of Shepherd about himself he is making more than a show of pastoral concern he is, in effect, claiming to those who oppose him, ‘I am God among you acting as you should’.

Religious leaders were called to be shepherds of the people, teaching and leading them. They had failed to do so and they were often taken to task by the prophets who castigated their shepherding. (Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 10). They did not feed or protect the flock entrusted to their care, rather they were indifferent or exploitative.

Elsewhere 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.

Thus Jesus as the good shepherd, is not the Jesus of Victorian stained glass; clean and tidy with a lamb around his neck. This is a ‘real life’ shepherd with all the toughness, courage, commitment, experience and purpose necessary to care.

We keep sheep for meat but then sheep were kept primarily for wool and milk and therefore were with the shepherd for a long time. They had names and grew to answer to them and to run to the voice of their shepherd as he leads them. He goes ahead of them to make sure the way is safe; they are led, not driven as we are used to seeing. When he calls, his sheep recognise his voice, and he knows them by name.

Here Jesus plainly says that those who recognise truth and goodness will respond to him. 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.



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.

Blessing

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection,
and give us grace to follow in his steps.

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

1 Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour,
first-begotten from the dead,
Thou alone, our strong Defender,
liftest up Thy people's head.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Jesus, true and living Bread!

3 Paschal Lamb! Thine offering finished
once for all when Thou wast slain,
in its fullness undiminished
shall forevermore remain.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Cleansing souls from every stain.

2 Prince of Life, for us Thou livest,
by Thy body souls are healed;
Prince of Peace, Thy peace Thou givest,
by Thy blood is pardon sealed.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Word of God in flesh revealed.

4 Life-imparting heavenly Manna,
stricken Rock, with streaming side,
heaven and earth with loud hosanna
worship Thee, the Lamb who died.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Risen, ascended, glorified!

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