



Fourth Sunday in Easter

30th April 2023

Good Shepherd Sunday

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 Faithful Shepherd, feed me
in the pastures green;
faithful Shepherd, lead me
where thy steps are seen.

2 Hold me fast, and guide me
in the narrow way;
so, with thee beside me,
I shall never stray.

3 Daily bring me nearer
to the heavenly shore;
may my faith grow clearer,
may I love thee more:

4 Hallow every pleasure,
every joy and pain;
be thyself my treasure,
though none else I gain.

5 Day by day prepare me
as thou seest best,
then let angels bear me
to thy promised rest.

Risen Christ,
faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep:
teach us to hear your voice
and to follow your command,
that all your people may be gathered into one flock,
to the glory of God the Father.

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, 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.

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.
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.
All 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.

A reading from the New Testament
Acts 2. 42-end

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This is the word of the Lord.

All 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

1 Peter 2 19-end

The Example of Christ's Suffering

¹⁹ For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²² "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."²³ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

This is the word of the Lord.

All Thanks be to God.

Hymn

1 The King of love my shepherd
is,
whose goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.

2 Where streams of living water
flow,
my ransomed soul he leadeth;
and where the verdant pastures
grow,
with food celestial feedeth.

3 Perverse and foolish, oft I
strayed,
but yet in love he sought me;
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought
me.

4 In death's dark vale I fear no
ill,
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort
still,
thy cross before to guide me.

5 Thou spreadst a table in my
sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and oh, what transport of
delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

6 And so through all the length
of days,
thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy
praise
within thy house forever.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John (Ch. 10 1-10)

Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

10 "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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you O Christ

Reflection

Today's gospel may be read as a continuation of the events recorded in chapter 9. There Jesus breaks the Sabbath laws when he heals a man born blind. This triggers yet another confrontation with the Pharisees. They have little care and compassion for the healed man but a great deal of concern about Jesus' apparent disregard for the Law.

This 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 verbally taken to bits 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. Jesus' allusion to thieves and bandits is deliberate.

Jesus increases the pressure by calling himself 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.

This 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.

The good shepherd does not clamber over a wall like a thief, illegally, but enters through the door. He is recognised and the door is opened for him. His role is legitimate and correct. When he calls, his sheep recognise his voice and he knows them by name.

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.

Then Jesus changes the image. He is not only the good shepherd he is also the gate, the doorway to the sheepfold. There were two kinds of shelters for a flock. In towns and villages all the sheep were herded together at the end of the day and a door keeper kept them safe. In the hillside, there is an enclosure and the shepherd sleeps across the opening. In the morning the various shepherds would make their distinctive call and their sheep, recognising his voice, would follow him out to pasture. They will not respond to a stranger.

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.

Jesus speaks of himself as The Door and the Good Shepherd. A door opens the way. "Enter by me and you will be safe go in and out and find pasture ... this is why I came, that you might have life and have it more abundantly".

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.

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,
accept our prayers, and be with us always.
Amen.

And a prayer for ourselves based on Psalm 23



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.

Gathering our prayers and praise into one, let us pray as our Saviour taught us

Our Father which art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
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.

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.

Blessing

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

1 Thou art the Way: to thee alone
from sin and death we flee;
and he who would the Father seek,
must seek him, Lord, by thee.

2 Thou art the Truth: thy Word alone
true wisdom can impart;
thou only canst inform the mind,
and purify the heart.

3 Thou art the Life: the rending tomb
proclaims thy conquering arm,
and those who put their trust in thee
nor death nor hell shall harm.

4 Thou art the Way, the Truth, the Life:
grant us that Way to know,
that Truth to keep, that Life to win,
whose joys eternal flow.

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