

ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE
25th APRIL 2021 - FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

INTRODUCTION

'We know love by this, that Christ laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.' (1 John 3:16)



Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, and I'm actually rather happy to be a disciple sheep. I hope you are too because we have the best shepherd ever to look after us. Now sheep aren't necessarily known for their grace, intelligence or skill; in fact they're often thought of as being a bit stupid. That said, they do know a good shepherd when they see one! Our Good Shepherd knows each of us by name – just how wonderful is that? And how very precious we are to him. So precious that as Saint John tells us, he was prepared to lay down his life for us.

It's also Vocations Sunday today – a day to give thanks to God - that he calls each and every one of us by name, to different forms of service in his Church and in the world. But in the busyness of life we can sometimes get drawn away from our true vocation.

Pause for a moment, to reflect on the extent of God's love for you seen in Christ; and think about God's call on your life. Pray for openness to the Holy Spirit, that you may know God's guiding presence, and hear God's voice and discern or perhaps rediscover his call upon your life.

CALL TO WORSHIP

The light and peace of Jesus Christ be with you
and also with you.

The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.
Let us rejoice and sing God's praise for ever.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

TURNING AGAIN TO GOD

God has called us to follow Christ,
and has formed us into a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
to declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called us
out of darkness into his marvellous light.
Let us confess the times when we have failed to heed this call.

Lord Jesus, you said to your disciples:
'You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.'
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, we know that the harvest is plentiful
but the labourers are few.
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you appointed us to go and bear fruit that will last.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

May God who loved the world so much
that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive us our sins
and make us holy to serve him in the world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

We Have Everything We Need – A Psalm

The Lord is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.
**He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.**

He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honour to his name.



**Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.**

Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me.
**You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.**

You honour me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.
**Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the Lord
forever.**

(Psalm 23 – New Living Translation)

Pause for Reflection

I Will Sing the Wondrous Story

I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me;
How He left the realms of glory
For the cross of Calvary.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it with the saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.

I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Threw his loving arms around me,
Led me back into his way.
Days of darkness still may meet me,
Sorrow's path I oft may tread;
But his presence still is with me,
By his guiding hand I'm led.

NEW TESTAMENT READING

Acts 4:5-12 (New Living Translation)

[Having spent the night in prison for healing a man and then teaching about Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter and John are brought before the council to give account]

The next day the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest. They brought in the two disciples and demanded, "By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of our people, are we being questioned today because we've done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says,

'The stone that you builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone.'

There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING

John 10:11-18 (NRSV)

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



"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 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. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

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

REFLECTION (by Margaret Mandrell)

Today we are looking at Jesus the Good Shepherd. His image has been found in many churches as a plaster figure with long, flowing curly hair and with one hand upheld in blessing, the other holding a crook, a beatific expression on his face. Today we will look at a more realistic image of an involved, passionate saviour who deeply cares for each one of us, and longs for us to be in relationship with him. Countless people have found comfort in Psalm 23 which talks of the Lord as our shepherd, being with us throughout life, and giving us assurance of his presence for ever. As with all relationships however, there are responsibilities and expectations, based on love for God and others. Love is at the heart of God's will for our lives, love for God and our neighbours.

We are reminded in our readings that Jesus was willing to give his life for us, and that we should also be prepared to do this for one another. We are called upon to help those in need and show our love in both truth and action. Words are not enough as we are called to service, not through a sense of duty, but stemming from love for others. We are all called to serve God according to our gifts, talents and contexts. Each of us has a vocation, and we can seek as a body of believers to identify and nurture the gifts and callings of every member of the church. We are told that we are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, chosen to declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. That is a powerful promise and a challenge for us all.

Justin Welby says "There is no greater joy in life than to follow Christ. No greater adventure, no greater purpose, no better way to live. But to follow Christ does not mean that we always know exactly what to do, and how our lives will unfold. Following Christ is embarking on a journey, and listening to the promptings of the Spirit, in prayer, in Scripture and through love for God and love for others, our brothers and sisters in Christ, so that we discover and grow into our calling. God calls all of us. ... a friend, worker, parent, sibling, church member, carer, volunteer, and many others, to taking up specific responsibilities in life, work or church." We are invited to faithful discipleship, living out our faith, and striving to be obedient disciples of Christ. Did you know that 95% of our life is spent outside church? We can serve others in every action we do, where - ever we are. This commitment will influence how we spend our time, talents and money, and our attitude to work and leisure.

I made a conscious decision to follow Jesus when I was 6 years old, in my Sunday school classroom, and as a child felt very strongly that I should be a missionary. It took me until I was over 60 to fulfil this calling, first in Sierra Leone and more recently in Zambia. I grew up, and spent some time working and living with abused and abandoned children in a residential home in Birmingham, where I taught them prayers each evening and took them to church. I tried to give them constant, unconditional love and respect, listening to them, and giving them time. I went on to teach young people who were disaffected, impoverished and often delinquent, and throughout my career I have been involved in empowering those in difficult situations, trying through valuing them as individuals to help them develop their gifts and talents.



It is only now that I realise this has been my mission field, the place I was called by God to be in, and where I could serve him best. I have sometimes faltered in my journey of faith and made wrong decisions, but I have known the gift of forgiveness and restoration, and the joy of serving others.

On this Sunday we are invited to explore our calling as followers of Christ, and to seek ways of serving. The journey is a challenge, but worthwhile.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

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

The Lord is our Shepherd;
Knowing his care for us, let us pray.

We give thanks that you have called
each one of us to serve you
in your world and in your Church.
Strengthen us and equip us
to hear your voice, to recognise your call,
and give us grace and courage to fulfil that
calling.
Silence.

The Lord is our Good Shepherd:
There is nothing we shall lack.

We pray for all who shepherd others
as bishops and pastors,
and for all in their care;
for Christians threatened and under attack;
and all whose ministry feels demanding.
For a greater affection and care, one for another,
in the church and in our community.



Silence.

The Lord is our Good Shepherd:

There is nothing we shall lack.

We pray for all in positions of leadership
and influence in our world,
that they may use that power for good;
for an increase in our concern
for one another's well-being, across all barriers,
and for all who are working to build community.

Silence.

The Lord is our Good Shepherd:

There is nothing we shall lack.

We pray for all who are wandering, those who feel lost,
and for those who have no idea that any Good Shepherd exists.
We pray for all who are unaware that they are precious
and valued by the God who loved them into being
and longs to love them into life.
Remembering all who are in sickness or any kind need
we pray especially for: Rose Adams, Adrina and Alan Price, Pam Mallaber,
David New and Anna Clements.
And in a moments silence, we hold before you those who are on our own
hearts and in need of prayer.

Silence.

The Lord is our Good Shepherd:

There is nothing we shall lack.

We pray for all who mourn,
that they may know your comfort and your peace.
We pray for those who have died to this earthly life,
that the Good Shepherd,
who understands what it is to die,
may bring them safely home.
We remember those who have recently died, especially Dave Walker,
Rosemary Rowberry and David Thompson.

And we remember with love and gratitude: Felix Alexander,
Joan Kendall, Alan Renwick and Daphne Link.
Silence.

The Lord is our Good Shepherd:
There is nothing we shall lack.

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

We pray the Lord's Prayer together as Jesus taught us, saying:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your 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 the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**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.**

Pause for Reflection - The Lord's My Shepherd

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*

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 in You alone.....

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 in You alone.....

SENDING

Christ, you call us.

Help us respond to your call.

Christ, you call us to be your people in the world.
We will follow your call to be your people:
our hands will do your work,
our feet will walk your way.
Christ, you call us.

Help us respond to your call.

Christ, you call each one to be your child for the world.
may our hearts search for your truth,
may our souls listen for your voice,
may our lives follow in your path.
Christ, you call each one of us.

Help us respond to your call.

Christ, you call us to be your people in the world.

We are the body of Christ.

May the boldness of the Spirit transform us,
may the gentleness of the Spirit lead us,
may the gifts of the Spirit equip us
to serve and worship God;
and may the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always.
Amen.

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