

**Sunday Morning Worship**  
**Readings, Reflection and Prayers 21<sup>st</sup> April**



**Acts 4:5-12**

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is

"the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;  
it has become the cornerstone."

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

This is the word of the Lord.

## **1 John 3:16-24**

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

This is the word of the Lord.

### **John 10:11-18**

'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.'

## **Reflection by Ann Waizeneker**

In this morning's gospel reading we hear Jesus describing himself as the Good Shepherd and us as his sheep. This analogy draws on the fact that a shepherd knows his sheep very well. In those days, shepherds would live out on the hills with their flocks and protect them from predators – wolves, bears, the occasional lion. Caring for them in such dangerous circumstances demonstrates a love and commitment far beyond the normal calling of work.

Jesus contrasts the shepherd's love for his flock with the more detached attitude of the hired hand who does not have the same commitment to his charges. The suggestion being that in saying this, Jesus is referring to some of the religious leaders of the time who were not properly carrying out their responsibility of care for their people.

I was reading recently about the origins of the shepherd's crook. I imagine many of us would think the curved end of the crook is primarily for hauling back sheep when they are playing up. But apparently the crook was driven deeply into the ground so that the shepherd could hold himself really still for long enough to allow the sheep to begin to trust him and to recognise him as the path to food and safety, the one to go to in danger. Now I don't know if that's true, but it does beg the question; what draws us to Christ, our shepherd? How do we come to know and trust in Jesus?

In using this analogy, Jesus signifies his close personal relationship with each of us and his willingness to die for us, his sheep. Where I think the analogy stops is at the issue of intentionality. What I mean is, that whereas the shepherd does not intend to die while protecting his sheep, Jesus knew that his death on the cross was necessary – this was his vocation, to lay down his life for his people. In other words, his sacrificial death was not an accident, it was intentional, part of God's plan.

Why should we believe this? Well, in John's account of the events leading up to the crucifixion, he portrays Jesus, not as a victim of circumstance, but as one who is in control of his destiny. This is particularly clear in two places:

- First, in the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, when Jesus identified himself to those who came to arrest him, and they fell back on the ground.
- Secondly during the Roman trial Pilate says to him: "don't you realise I have power to free you or to crucify you?" to which Jesus replies "you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."

So, the unfolding of the passion and resurrection is intentional. This plan of God is grounded in the intimacy between Christ the shepherd and his people, the sheep. And it is mirrored in the intimacy between God the Father and Christ his Son.

We should also take note I think of Jesus' words in verse 16: "*I have other sheep who do not belong to the fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd.*" The most likely meaning of this is God's intention that his sheepfold is for all nations, which would include the foreigners, the Gentiles. We have to remind ourselves how shocking and unwelcome an idea this would have been to many devout Jewish people, not least the elders of the church, so steeped in a theology which had until then, been their exclusive territory.

This passage creates a familiar picture of Christ, as the good shepherd. And as ever, when something is familiar / common, perhaps it is easy to stop thinking about it meaningfully. But we should take the time to think about how this great love, commitment and steadfastness of Christ speaks to us.

Above all, it surely demands a responsive love. So, we might ask ourselves, as the sheep respond to the call of their shepherd, how do we respond to the call of Christ? We see Peter and John responding in those verses we heard from Acts; they have been arrested for their teaching and healing, but Peter speaks out before the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews. He chooses an act of calculated (not reckless) courage – calculated in that Peter knows only too well the power of the court and the dangers he faces. His actions are a response to Christ's love, and to the words we just heard in the first letter of John:

*Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 1 John 3.18*

In other words, we are warned against being all talk and no action!

We all have choices to make in our journey of faith. Like Peter, sometimes we make good choices, at others not so good - that's when we need hauling back with the curved end of the crook!

And so let our prayer be:

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.

Amen.

## **Prayers**

The Lord is our shepherd,  
and we are the sheep of his pasture.  
Let us bring to him our cares and concerns  
for the church and for the world.

To the bidding: the Lord is my shepherd  
Please respond: there is nothing we shall want.

The Lord is my shepherd:  
**there is nothing we shall want.**

Good Shepherd of the sheep,  
we pray for the Church;  
for all congregations, for clergy  
and all who minister in Word and sacrament;  
We pray especially for our Bishops John and Martin  
in their shepherding of the Church in this diocese.  
We pray for clear guidance and direction  
in those issues which disturb us or divide us,  
asking not that you lead us the easy way  
but the way that is right and good.

*Silence*

The Lord is my shepherd:  
**there is nothing we shall want.**

Good Shepherd of the sheep,  
we pray for the world we inhabit-  
the world we have inherited  
and will pass on to successive generations.  
Teach us to look after it carefully and wisely,  
to share its gifts more fairly,  
and work together to ease its sufferings.

Turn the hearts of those who are separated from you,  
and encourage the timid to speak out  
for what is wholesome and good.

*Silence*

The Lord is my shepherd:  
**there is nothing we shall want.**

Good Shepherd of the sheep,  
we pray for our places of work and study,  
our colleagues, friends and neighbours,  
and the members of our families.  
We ask not for popularity at all costs,  
but the grace to do your will and be your witnesses  
to what it means to live lovingly,  
both when this is easy and also when it hurts.

*Silence*

The Lord is my shepherd:  
**there is nothing we shall want.**

Good Shepherd of the sheep,  
we pray for the weak and vulnerable,  
for those who must live  
depending on others for every need,  
for those who feel neglected and those who are oppressed.  
We pray for a greater reverence, one for another,  
for greater willingness  
to uphold and encourage one another;  
and we pray for healing and wholeness for those we name before you  
now: Joyce Pringle, Peter Murphy, Anuwat Wanggane, Joan Tyson, Alan  
Coe, Sam and Andy Fellows, Jack Tubby, Rob & Lucy, Roger Jones,  
Patricia Ash, Jason Thomson, Ryan Day, Bryan Plester, Brenda Hulland,  
David New, and Adrina and Alan Price.



*Silence*

The Lord is my shepherd:

**there is nothing we shall want.**

Good Shepherd of the sheep,

we remember those who have recently died and we pray for those who ache with sorrow at their going.

We remember with love and gratitude all those we love

but see no longer, and those whose anniversary of death falls at this time: Irene Everett-Perkins, Eric Orton, Daphne Link, Felix Alexander, Joan Kendall and Winifred Duckworth.

We commend them all into your unfailing and eternal care.

*Silence*

The Lord is my shepherd:

**there is nothing we shall want.**

Good Shepherd of the sheep,

we give you thanks that in you

we are able to live through good and ill

with abundance of life and wrapped in your love.

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers**

**for the sake of your Son,**

**our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

**Amen.**