

An act of worship for Kettering and Corby Circuit

Sunday 3 May 2020

Prepared by Ruth Fitch and Clare Pickering

Good morning and welcome to worship, this Sunday 3rd May 2020. Today, Clare and I will be looking at readings which include Psalm 23 and chapter 10 of John's Gospel in which Jesus speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd. The other readings given in the Lectionary today are

Acts chapter 2 vs 42-47 and

1 Peter 2 verses 19-25

Do look at them in your own time if you are able to.

We begin our worship this morning with a reflective meditation on Psalm 23, then leading into our opening prayers.

Meditation on Psalm 23

Dear Father in heaven

Thank you for the promise that in you I shall not want.

When I am overwhelmed, you calm my restless heart.

In trials that overpower me, like torrents in a raging river,

You call me to rest beside still waters.

You restore to me the peace I did not realise I had lost.

Even during the darkest times, amidst news of sickness and death, I thank you Father that I need not fear the unknown future. I need only look to you for protection and for comfort.

Even in the midst of things that bring fear, you bless me with grace that overflows. Your generosity is overwhelming and I am overcome by your mercy and your grace.

My Lord, my God, I could never ask for that which you offer to me as gift. I rejoice in the invitation to dwell in your house for ever.

Prayers of praise, thanksgiving and confession

Praise to You, Loving Father.

Praise to You, gracious Son of God.

Praise to You, mighty Holy Spirit.

You are the God who made and knows us

You are the God who calls us to relationship –
With you and with each other
You are the God we worship today and all days
For you are our God and we are your people.
We praise you, we worship you and we give you thanks.

We thank you that you are our leader, our shepherd, our guide
You have promised never to leave us.
Thank you, God.
Thank you Jesus.
Thank you Holy Spirit.

We thank you that in you we can have life in all its fullness.
That we can know and experience love and peace and joy.
Sometimes we don't feel very loving, or joyful or peaceful
But you are with us, even in the darkness.
Even there, in the bad times, you have promised to be with us always.

Despite our best efforts to be good people, to be Christians and true followers of Christ
We admit we sometimes get things wrong.
We mess up, God. And we're sorry for that.
For the things we said and did, and shouldn't have
For the things we didn't say, or do, and might have
We're sorry. Please forgive us.

Silence.

We have been told there is nothing we can do to make you love us more
And nothing we can do to make you love us less.
But your grace is enough for us all.
And so in that grace and mercy we hear your word;
that our sins are forgiven, and we can be set right with you in friendship and in love.

Thank you God.
Thank you Jesus.
Thank you Holy Spirit.

Make us walk by still waters and explore the depths of your love for us.
Let us realise you are with us always to the end of the age.
Let us always worship and praise and bless your holy name
One God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Song: Bless the Lord O my soul (ten thousand reasons)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSxocnlaN0A>

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before, O my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name

The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning
It's time to sing Your song again
Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me
Let me be singing when the evening comes

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before, o my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger
Your name is great and Your heart is kind
For all Your goodness I will keep on singing
10,000 reasons for my heart to find

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before, O my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name

And on that day when my strength is failing
The end draws near and my time has come
Still my soul will sing Your praise unending
10,000 years and then forevermore,
forevermore

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before, O my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before, O my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name

Yes, I will worship Your Holy name Lord,
I'll worship Your Holy name

The Gospel reading for today is John Chapter 10 verses 1 – 10: Jesus the Good Shepherd

John 10:1-10 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)

Jesus the Good Shepherd

[Jesus said] '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. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

SERMON – Clare (<https://youtu.be/AJW86nw9KHI>)

Hymn: The Lord's my Shepherd (Townend)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eIQQayhpak>

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 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.

It is great to be worshipping with so many of you across the circuit this morning and it is a real privilege to be able to share this time together.

When I was growing up, I only really had two experiences of shepherds and sheep; the first was seeing children in their dressing gowns with tea towels on their heads acting out the Christmas story, and the second was from watching 'One Man and his Dog' on television (do any of you remember it?) where the shepherd's job seemed to involve standing and whistling at a dog who had the hard task of trying to control and direct the sheep from behind – not instantly comparable with the images portrayed in the readings we have heard today.

There are many references to sheep and shepherds in the Bible and this would have been an illustration that many people at the time could relate to (even if they didn't always understand the message behind it). In today's world, some of these passages, particularly Psalm 23, have become very well-known and popularised through music, art and TV. Because of this, perhaps we don't always question what they mean for us today.

Before thinking about what the readings tell us about God and his relationship with us, let us consider the nature of sheep.

In the past, sheep have often been given the reputation of being daft creatures and requiring some kind of control. I must admit that I often thought this when watching 'One Man and His Dog' – especially when some sheep went the wrong way, followed the others blindly, or even refused to move at all. According to the Urban Dictionary (which is not necessarily an authentic point of reference) to be 'a sheep' is defined as 'someone who mindlessly follows others; a waste of flesh and braincells'. Not very complimentary! Are these the 'sheep' we should be like? Is this what God thinks of us?

Of course not! Sheep are not stupid – they have minds of their own, they are very protective (hence their instinctiveness to flock together), and they form friendships with others within the flock. However, having minds of their own can mean that they may get distracted, or find themselves on the wrong path. Within a flock, there are always going to be various 'types' of sheep:

- those who always seem to be up front, following the shepherd closely;
- those who are in the middle somewhere, happy to follow others and hope they are on the right track;
- those who are stragglers towards the back who struggle sometimes to keep up;
- those who may stray and lose sight of the flock.

Perhaps you can relate to one of these 'types' of sheep. Perhaps you have been a different 'type' of sheep at different points on your Christian journey in faith. I know that I have had times in my life where I have strayed and needed a good poke from the Good Shepherd's crook! I invite you to take a moment to reflect on what 'type' of sheep you feel you are just now...

So let us contemplate what the readings tell us about God.

Both Psalm 23 and the Gospel reading focus on a Good Shepherd who knows his sheep by name. Indeed, the psalmist declaring that 'The Lord is My Shepherd' suggests a very personal relationship between the shepherd and sheep. John 10 verse 4 states that 'When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.'

Not only does the shepherd lead the sheep safely to pasture, he chooses the right paths. But right for whom? Sheep often come across different paths, some are good paths, some are dangerous – this is one of the reasons why they need a shepherd to guide them. However, there may be times in our lives when the path that God chooses for us is not clear, or certainly not what we would have chosen for ourselves and this can cause anxiety, especially when the path ahead seems a rocky one. Sometimes, we can stray and choose the wrong path, or we may find ourselves on a difficult path that is right with God. Verse 4 of Psalm 23 reassures us that it is at these points of deepest darkness in our lives that we will find God alongside us, comforting and protecting us.

As well as the description of the good shepherd in John 10, Jesus also describes himself as the gate to the sheep pen, demonstrating that he is not only the shepherd who leads his sheep, but also that the sheep must pass through him to be saved. How is this possible? We must remember that Jesus, as the Son of God, can be all of these things: he leads his sheep who will follow because they recognise his voice, he chooses the right paths for them and is with them throughout their journey, particularly during troubled times, and he is the gateway to salvation and fulness of life.

But what happens to the sheep who have a tendency to get distracted or stray?

The good news is that the Good Shepherd does not leave these sheep behind. The parable of the Lost Sheep confirms that even if one sheep out of a hundred is lost, God will search for that one and celebrate when it is found. In Ezekiel 34 verse 12 the Lord says: 'As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.'

This particularly spoke to me at a time when we may be feeling that we are scattered and not able to physically 'flock' together in the fellowship of our church congregations. However, we can take comfort that God is with us and will look after us through what seems like a global 'valley of death' at the moment.

In Stuart Townend's version of The Lord's My Shepherd, the chorus repeats the words: 'I will trust in You alone' and it is this faith and trust that is so important when making the decision to follow Christ.

Wherever we are on our spiritual journey with Christ, let us remember that we, as free-thinking sheep, can show our commitment to following the Good Shepherd by ensuring that we, too, demonstrate the unconditional love of Jesus, not only to those known to us within our 'flock' but also to those who may feel lost, forgotten or unwelcome.

Amen

Prayers of intercession

Good Shepherd; teach us to follow you
to care for all that are close to us,
to protect those who are threatened,
to welcome those who are rejected,
to forgive those who are burdened by guilt,
to heal those who are broken and sick,
to share with those who have little or nothing,
to take the time to really know one another
and love as you have loved us.

Good Shepherd,
Teach us to follow you
to spread compassion to those who are far away,
to speak for those who are voiceless,
to defend those who are oppressed and abused,
to work for justice for those who are exploited,
to make peace for those who suffer violence,
to take the time to recognise our connectedness,
and to love as you have loved us.

Good Shepherd,
Teach us to follow you
and to be faithful to calling you gave us
to be shepherds in your name.

Let us, wherever we are, join together with the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Our Father
Who art in heaven
Hallowed by 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.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and for evermore. Amen.

We finish our worship with the song: **Lord, I come to you (CMP 880 or STF 471)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga6Qtxzd6vk>

Lord I come to You
Let my heart be changed, renewed
Flowing from the grace
That I've found in You
Lord I've come to know
The weaknesses I see in me
Will be stripped away
By the power of Your love

Hold me close
Let Your love surround me
Bring me near
Draw me to Your side
And as I wait
I'll rise up like the eagle
And I will soar with You
Your Spirit leads me on
In the power of Your love

Lord unveil my eyes
Let me see You face to face
The knowledge of Your love
As You live in me
Lord renew my mind
As Your will unfolds in my life
In living every day
By the power of Your love

Hold me close
Let Your love surround me
Bring me near
Draw me to Your side
And as I wait
I'll rise up like the eagle
And I will soar with You
Your Spirit leads me on
In the power of Your love