

Sunday 21st April
– Fourth Sunday of Easter
Morning Worship

Led by Sue Nelms, LLM

<https://zoom.us/j/82311473640>



Gathering and Greeting

We come from scattered lives to meet with God.

Let us recognize his presence with us.

**As God's people we have gathered:
let us worship him together.**

Opening Prayer

Let us give thanks to Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd,
who laid down his life for us all, saying: we thank you, Jesus our Lord.

You lead us out and we find pasture:
we thank you, Jesus our Lord.

You call us by name and we hear your voice:
we thank you, Jesus our Lord.

Whoever enters by you will be saved:
we thank you, Jesus our Lord.

You laid down your life in order to take it up again:
we thank you, Jesus our Lord.

You came that we might have life and have it abundantly:
we thank you, Jesus our Lord.

You lead us through the valley of the shadow of death
and we fear no evil:
we thank you, Jesus our Lord.

Hymn – The King of love my shepherd is

- 1 The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.
- 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 spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O 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 for ever. Henry Williams Baker (1821-1877) (Public Domain)

Confession

Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord,
we come to you in sorrow for our sins,
and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength,
and not by the power of your resurrection.
In your mercy, forgive us.
Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes,
as faithless and not believing.
In your mercy, forgive us.
Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone,
and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us.
Lord, hear us and help us.

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Readings by Ann Griffiths

Acts 4:5-12

⁵ The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem,
⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all
who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ When they had made the
prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by
what name did you do this?’ ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit,
said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ 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, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ This Jesus is
“the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;
it has become the cornerstone.”

¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

John 10:11-18

¹¹ 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² 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. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own 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 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. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ 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 Sue Nelms

In the run up to this morning's gospel reading Jesus has been using various forms of shepherding analogy to teach the disciples and followers. He began with the concept of the shepherd who has the way to his sheep in the sheepfold opened for him. He talked about the difference between the shepherd who would keep his sheep safe and the thief or bandit who climbs in by another way. The thief is coming to steal, kill and destroy but the shepherd gives life and gives it abundantly. The people around him did not understand what he was trying to say to them so then he explained that he was the gate through which the sheep might pass and stay safe.

Finally, in this morning's passage, he tells the people that he is the Good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

I thought that it might be useful at this point to think a bit about what a shepherd, particularly a good shepherd, actually does, because I suspect that when most of us think of a shepherd we think of an idyllic image of a man (though it could just as possibly be a woman), holding a

shepherd's crook, standing behind his (or her) flock of sheep. It is a quite peaceful scene which enables us to forget just how complex the role of a shepherd really is. According to Farming Weekly a shepherd can expect to earn between £18 and £25,000 and should understand shearing skills, foot trimming, All Terrain Vehicle driving, first aid, health and safety, transportation of livestock, safe use of sheep dip, safe use of veterinary medicines, flock management, sheep husbandry. Even feeding is not simply a case of sticking the flock out in a field and leaving them to it because their nutrition needs to be closely monitored so that they get a balanced diet; if they don't, they won't thrive.

Jesus was not like the classical image that you might see on Christmas cards of the shepherd calmly standing behind his or her flock (with or without their crook and sheepdog). According to the Message translation, the Good Shepherd puts the sheep before himself, possibly physically as well as intentionally, sacrificing himself if necessary, which to me conjures up a rather more animated image of being alert and potentially ready to respond to an attack head-on.

The image of the Good Shepherd is not a new idea, limited to the New Testament gospels; there are several references to one in the Old Testament. Isaiah talked about someone who "will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep" (Isaiah 40.11).

Ezekiel talked about God the True Shepherd (Ezekiel 34.11-16) "¹¹ For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. ¹⁶ I will seek the

lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice”.

Ezekiel also makes the link to King David in the words “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd” (Ezekiel 34.23). As we are reminded so often, Jesus was descended from the line of David. David was not just an ordinary shepherd; he was a shepherd king but an earthly one rather than a Heavenly one. We also know that he was a brave one because when Saul doubted David’s ability to deal with Goliath, David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, ³⁵ I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it.

³⁶ Your servant has killed both lion and bear” (1 Samuel 17.34-36). Jesus’s words may well have reminded his listeners of the stories about David from their own scriptures.

The references to the worthless shepherd also have their roots in the Old Testament. Zechariah wrote “¹⁶ For I am now raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for the perishing, or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs. ¹⁷ Oh, my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be completely withered, his right eye utterly blinded! (Zechariah 11.16-17).

The good shepherd is invested in his sheep. He lays down his life for them. The hired hand does not; instead he runs away and leaves them. The wolf is a very present threat and will devour the sheep given the opportunity. The hired hand doesn’t care for the sheep. The good shepherd does and will protect them against anything. The good shepherd knows every one of his flock; the hired hand doesn’t. The good shepherd will die for his sheep.

He will welcome other sheep into his flock; the hired hand can’t be bothered.

The sheep know the good shepherd’s voice and trust it; the hired hand drifts in and out without making a mark on them. The good shepherd

chooses to lay his life down for the sheep; the hired hand chooses not to. According to the Message translation “the Father loves me: because I freely lay down my life. And so I am free to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down; I also have the right to take it up again. I received this authority personally from my Father.” Powerful words about powerful actions.

On a recent Quiet Day at Little Gidding I stood and watched the sheep and their lambs for a while. They really were sweet but pretty clueless. If I approached them the lambs would run towards their mothers. The mothers might have stood up as I approached but they didn't really do anything else and I suspect that I could simply have grabbed a lamb and legged it should I have been that way inclined. Sheep are not designed to look after themselves; they need a shepherd. Apart from anything else, their eyesight is limited and they can only see straight ahead, with no side vision. That makes them pretty vulnerable from predators. We might not like to think it, but we can be like sheep – a bit short sighted and vulnerable. Actually we need to be like sheep! We may like to think that we are tough and strong and capable of looking after ourselves, doing it ‘Our Way’ to quote Frank Sinatra but in reality we need a shepherd to depend on. We need to be aware of our vulnerability, to wear it even, because we can't do everything ourselves. We are not the way to God; Jesus is. After all, He is the way, the truth, the life (John 14.6).

We are blessed. We never have to be alone because our shepherd is with us even if we can't see him. We never have to be a ‘lost sheep’ because our shepherd is there to guide and direct us. We don't need to fear the wolf or the bear because we have a good shepherd to keep us safe. We have a God who will open up the way to safety. We have a God who sees that we are fed as we need to be. We have a God who is with us protecting us from danger, even when we don't know it. I suspect that generally we don't tend to spend too long thinking about what a good shepherd should be. Fortunately for us Jesus knows what it means to be a good shepherd so he can say with confidence ‘I am the Good Shepherd.’ Amen to that.

Responsory

Fear not for I have redeemed you

I have called you by name you are mine.

Fear not for I have redeemed you

I have called you by name you are mine.

When you walk through the waters I will be with you

When you walk through fire you shall not be burned

I have called you by name you are mine

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

Fear not for I have redeemed you

I have called you by name you are mine.

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession by Dona McCullagh

As we stand in the light of the resurrection, let us pray for the Church, the world, and all who wait for the Spirit's revealing power.

1. We pray first for the Church

Good Shepherd of the sheep, we pray for the worldwide Church, for all congregations, for all pastors and all who minister in word and sacrament.

We pray especially today for Bishop Dagmar, and for the continuing process to appoint a new Bishop of Ely. We pray for wisdom, for discernment and for patience as the right candidate emerges. We pray also for those involved in the appointment of a new Team Rector for the Lordsbridge Team, and for all who contribute their time, skills and dedication, seen and unseen, to the worshipping life of the communities within it.

God of glory, may your light shine in this our zoom church community as you work among us and bless us with your presence. We offer you the gifts you have given us and we offer ourselves to you and to each other for the glory of your name.

(We take this opportunity to pray for those sharing in worship alongside us today. We might like to in this moment of quiet each bring before God the name of one person here who we don't know as well as others, to simply ask for God's blessing on them.)

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

2. We pray for the world

God of glory, we pray for all in positions of leadership and influence in our world, that they may use that power for good. We pray for an increase in our concern for one another's wellbeing, across all barriers of race, age, wealth, poverty, language and culture. We pray for all who are working to build community, especially in areas of conflict and violence. May the world's leaders and thinkers, and may we too, stand up for what is right, and be firm in our faith and strengthened by your power. May your kingdom come and your will be done.

(In a moment of quiet, we bring to God those countries that are in fear of what the future brings, nations in civil war, and peoples suffering the

many consequences of natural disasters, men, women and children who are caught in war zones not of their own making. We might like to bring before God the name of one country in particular and pray for God's blessing on its people.)

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

3. We pray for those who are suffering

God of glory, may the homes, school, shop and workplaces in our communities become places where your glory is seen and experienced in the ordinary things, the everyday routines.

We pray today for the weak and the vulnerable in the places where we live, work and socialise; for all those who find life an exhausting struggle in the face of hardship, or who long for some respite from pain or depression. Support them in their troubles, bring healing and reassurance, and touch them with the gentleness of your peace.

(In a moment of quiet, we pray for those we know who are suffering, simply bringing the names of those we know and laying them at the feet of God in trust that he holds them in his merciful love.)

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

4. We pray for those who have died

God of glory, teach us to understand death in the context of your eternity, so that our fears are calmed as we approach it. Welcome with merciful love those who have recently died and shelter their loved ones, too, by your loving presence even in the midst of their grief.

(In a moment of quiet, we remember those who have died or who have been bereaved. We pray especially for the family of Ron Clements, in gratitude for the time we spent with him as part of our community. We pray for Brenda and for John as they continue to negotiate life without Clive and Saskia respectively, and for those among us whose losses are more distant but which on many days may still feel fresh.)

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

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.

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

Collect

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**

Rejoicing in God's new creation,
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:
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 forever. Amen.

Hymn – Will you come and follow me

I Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown,
in you and you in me?

- 2 Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?
- 3 Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?
- 4 Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?
- 5 Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.

In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

John L Bell (born 1949) and Graham Maule (1958-2019)

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Notices

Conclusion

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing,
through the power of the Holy Spirit;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ. Amen.