

Written Service 30th April 2023
A service of worship for use at home
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Today is the fourth Sunday of Easter and the set reading for the day is 'The Good Shepherd'.

Call to Worship: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul.

Hymn:
*(Chorus) Alleluia, Alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord,
Alleluia, Alleluia, give praise to His name.*

Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
He is the King of creation:
(Chorus)

God has proclaimed the just reward:
New life for all! Alleluia!
(Chorus)

Spread the good news o're all the earth:
Jesus has died and has risen
(Chorus)

Come; let us praise the living God,
Joyfully sing to our Saviour:
(Chorus)

We have been crucified with Christ:
Now we shall live forever:
(Chorus)

Prayers of Adoration and Praise:

A familiar figure on a distant shore;
A familiar action at a kitchen table;
A presence in the midst of doubt;
**O Risen Christ,
You come to surprise and delight us;
You open wide the door to joy.
Hopefully, we worship you.
Hesitantly, we adore you.**

Living Lord,
Who became a vulnerable human being and lived an earthly life,
Who experienced those emotions we all experience, of joy and sadness, love and rejection, hope and disappointment:
We worship and adore you.

Healing Lord,
Who brought sight to the blind and gave steps to the lame,
Who offered comfort to the sorrowful and strength to the weak,
Who spoke words of hope to the hopeless and became The Way to those who had lost their way.
We worship and adore you.

Dying Lord,
Who suffered and died, was beaten and tortured,
Who went silently and willingly to the Cross,
Who asked His Father's forgiveness for those who had hung Him there.

We worship and adore you.

Risen Lord,
During this Easter Season, we celebrate the joyful news that Jesus is alive,
We celebrate the amazing love of God, shown in the giving of His son for all humanity,
We celebrate the fact that death has been overcome and new life is a gift to all who believe.

We worship and adore you.

**Living, loving, risen Lord,
We worship and adore you. AMEN.**

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Reading: John 10:7-16

So, Jesus said again, "I am telling you the truth: I am the gate for the sheep. All others who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep do not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever comes in by me will be saved; they will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes in only to steal, kill and destroy. I have come in order that you may have life – life in all its fullness.

"I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep. When a hired man, who is not a shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away; so the wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them. The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me. And I am willing to die for them.

There are other sheep which belong to me that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them too; they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd."

Reading of a modern parable:

On a bleak autumn evening, on the hills of mid Wales, when the driving rain was turning to sleet, the walkers saw a shepherd and his dog gathering sheep into the sheepfold where there was food and shelter away from the biting wind and cold.

The sheep were scattered over the hillside, the dog excitedly running here and there, getting nowhere until the insistent whistles and calls of the shepherd brought the panting dog under control and working together, had gathered most of the sheep who were only too glad to find shelter.

However, there were three contrary sheep who seemed to think that they knew better. They were sure they were fine and could look after themselves. So, they galloped up the hill instead of down. When most of the sheep were safely penned, the weary shepherd, head bent against the fierce wind, set off to find his contrary sheep. By this time the foolish creatures had run into a gorse bush growing perilously close to a rocky escarpment. They became tangled in the bush – thick winter wool caught in the thorns and spikes. Gently the shepherd untangled each one, snagging his hands on the thorns and drawing blood.

At last the sheep were free and the dog herded them down towards the sheepfold. But even then, one of them made a bid for freedom. Adventure on the open hillside was more appealing than the tame safety of the pen! It broke ranks and, ignoring the sheepdog, turned sharply to the left and ran straight over the edge.

It only slid and tumbled a few feet, but it was bruised and frightened. It lay on a narrow ledge and bleated pitifully. Again, the shepherd penned the others and headed up the hill. He clambered over the ledge and down to the frightened sheep. Patiently, he encouraged it to walk along the ledge until it came to a way up and out. The dog then took control of the sheep and made sure the dog reached the pen safely.

Hymn:

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me down to lie,
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill;
For thou art with me, and thy rod
And staff me comfort still.

My soul He doth restore again
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
E'en for His own name's sake.

My table thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me,
And in God's house for evermore
My dwelling place shall be

Sermon:

I'm sure that we are all aware that Jesus spoke in parables. Here, Jesus speaks of himself as the 'Good Shepherd', but did you also realise that that He only explained one of them – and this is not the one? He left His followers to work out what they meant, and we have been doing that for the best part of 2,000 years!

We have just read a modern parable of a shepherd on the hills of central Wales: maybe this has something to say to us. If you have forgotten it, maybe you should read it again.

There are numerous pictures and stained-glass windows in Victorian churches depicting the 'Good Shepherd'. Jesus is shown with lovely clean hands and His clothing is clean and bright – even the sheep and lambs are docile. Jesus, our Good Shepherd is much more like the shepherd on the Welsh hillside – hands calloused and bleeding, exhausted but still caring for the sheep. But, in this modern parable, who represents us? Who are we?

1. The Shepherd of course represents Jesus – hard working, knowing only discomfort, hands ripped and sore: but are we meant to leave it all to Him? Do we have a part to play? Paul, in his letter to the Philippians said, "May the mind that was in Christ Jesus be also in you." So the work of Jesus is also for you and me – and that means all of us. But we have the assurance that Christ Jesus is with us whatever we are called to do. This may change with age and infirmity, but we are called to be part of the body of Christ.
2. Are we all obedient sheep, always following Christ were ever He leads? Maybe we are some of the time, but maybe not all of the time.
3. Or, are we errant sheep, thinking we know best and always ready to blame God when things go wrong? The shepherd is still in pain as He tries to bring His sheep into the sheep pen. We can blame God when in fact we don't actually ask Him what he wants us to do – and sometimes it maybe something that he intends should be done by someone else. What we like to do is to make our own decisions and then ask Him to ratify them. Then we get upset when things don't go our way.

4. Or, are we like the sheepdog, rushing about excitedly and getting in the way? You may have seen 'One Man and His Dog' but not all sheepdogs are so well behaved! Do we run about, eager to help, exhausted and getting nowhere until the shepherd brings it under control? Only then are we able to be of use as we work with the shepherd.
5. What about the other people in the story? There were the walkers – watching but always on the sidelines, never getting really involved.
It is always easier in a big church to get lost and never really involved. We always hope that someone else will answer the need. In a small church it is not so easy to hope someone else will take on the difficult or time-consuming service – even if the most we can do is to pray for those in need or doing difficult task.

Meditation based on the modern parable:

You are the Good Shepherd Lord.

I've seen you in Victorian paintings and stain glass windows lit by the sun,

A clean and tidy shepherd in dressed in white with well behaved lambs in your arms and docile sheep at your feet.

But these are not real are they Lord?

The Welsh hill farmer, soaked to the skin, with rough clothes and calloused hands are nearer the mark.

Like the hill farmer you suffered for your sheep, and continue to suffer to bring them to safety.

How do you see us Lord?

Are we like the contrary sheep, headstrong, going our own way,
Believing we know best?

Are we lost in the dark caught in the brambles, dangerously near the edge?

Determined to follow our own paths,

Away from the way that leads to safety with you.

If that is where I am today Lord, Come now and lead me safely home.

Or, do you see me more like the sheepdog, eager to rescue the sheep?

But, sometimes running all over the place, exhausting myself and making a lot of noise,
But achieving very little,

Until I listen to the voice of the shepherd,

Sometimes lost among the distracting noises of the wind and the rain.

If this is where I am today Lord,

Help me to see that, just like the sheepdog, I cannot work alone.

I work best if I put myself under the direction

Of the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

Or, do you see me like one of the hill walkers Lord?

Out on the hillside certainly but simply watching what is going on,

Keeping out of the action,

Content to be safely on the path but uninvolved.

If this is where I am Lord,

Give me a longing for your Kingdom,

And a sense of urgency to join the rescue of those who have lost their way;

And rejoice with you as the lost sheep are found and brought home.

Prayers of confession:

If we have fallen into despair.

Lord forgive us.

If we have failed to hope in you,

Lord forgive us.

If we have been fearful of death,

Lord forgive us.

If we have forgotten the victory of Christ,

Lord forgive us.

May the living God raise us from despair,

Give us victory over sin and set us free in Christ.....**AMEN**

Hymn:

All I once held dear, built my life upon,
All this world reveres and wars to own,
All I once thought gain I have counted loss;
Spent and worthless now, compared to this.

*Knowing you Jesus, knowing you;
There is no greater thing.
You're, my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love you Lord.*

Now my heart's desire is to know you more,
To be found in you and be known as yours.
To possess by faith what I could not earn,
All surpassing gift of righteousness.

Knowing you Jesus ...

Oh, to know the power of your risen life,
And to know you in your suffering.
To become like you in your death my Lord,
So with you to live and never die.

Knowing you Jesus ...

Prayers of Intercession:

Almighty God, who cares for all people whatever their race, colour or creed – believer or unbeliever, we bring to you those situations where people live in despair – where the storms of life threaten to overwhelm; where feelings of inadequacy and lack of love blight their lives - we bring them knowing that you care more than we can know or understand.

Lord of peace; bring peace where there is violence. We bring to you Lord all those who have fled their own homes in fear. We pray for those fighting for freedom and justice and for all children who are brought up to believe in the power of the gun. (*We pray for all who live with violence and perpetrators of violence*)

Grant them your peace Lord.

Grant them your peace

Lord of Justice; bring justice where people live with injustice, for those places where governments and soldiers impose their will. (*We pray for all who live with injustice also we pray for our brothers and sisters who are suffering because of their faith*)

Grant them you peace Lord.

Grant them your peace

Lord of the poor and the marginalised; where there is poverty and unfairness, where people are hungry, homeless or suffering for the want of simple medicine, move in the hearts of those who have plenty so that there is a fair sharing of the earth's resources. (*We pray for those who see their children die for want of food and shelter and for those who continue to live with the effects of natural disasters.*)

Grant them your peace Lord.

Grant them your peace

Lord of creation; forgive us for misusing our world and making deserts where there had been abundance, for polluting clean air and water. We pray for the governments of the world who are so afraid of election defeats that they fail to take decisive action. *(We pray that you will give courage to those who work to save the environment.)*

Grant them you peace Lord.

Grant them your peace

Lord of healing and wholeness; we bring to you those who are known to us personally who need your healing power.....

Grant them your peace Lord.

Grant them your peace

Lord of the Kingdom of God, who came into this world, not to condemn it but to save, work with your people, give us courage, wisdom and power as we bring the message of your love and forgiveness to a needy world. *(We pray for the mission and ministry of your church)*

Grant us your peace Lord.

Grant us your peace. Amen

Hymn:

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love comes again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid Him, Love who had been slain,
Thinking that He never would awake again,
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love comes again, like wheat that springs up green.

Forth He came at Easter, like the risen grain,
He that in the three days in the grave had lain,
Quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love comes again, like wheat that springs up green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain,
Then your touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love comes again, like wheat that springs up green.

Final Prayer:

Risen Lord you have travelled this way before us and you have known joy and pain -
If the road ahead of us is smooth or stony:

Risen Lord, travel with us.

If our days are full of sunshine or rain:

Risen Lord, travel with us.

If in our lives we know joy or tears:

Risen Lord, travel with us.

And bring us at last to our home with you. **AMEN.**