



Service for Private or Personal Use Sunday 3rd May 2020

The Collect

God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ,
that great Shepherd of the sheep,
with the blood of the eternal covenant:
make us perfect in every good work to do your will,
and work in us all that is well-pleasing in your sight;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Hymn *Crown him with many crowns* (H&P 255, StF 347 MP109) or a favourite hymn of worship

Prayer

Lord God, loving and gracious Father, I marvel at the wonder of your love for me. The vastness and the beauty of your creation tell me of your greatness. But they can also make me feel so small and insignificant in 'the grand scheme of things,' that it seems astonishing that you should take any notice of me.

But so often in Scripture you used the picture of a shepherd to explain to those who – like me, at times – are slow to catch on or are dull of understanding. The love and the care flow from you, because that is the God you are. I don't have to strive to earn your love. I don't have to attract your attention.

While the world's news is dominated by statistics and people's suffering expressed only in numbers, remind me that you notice that one lost sheep, you count the hairs on my head as well as the stars in the heavens.

Easter Day is passed, but Jesus is still alive. You raised him from the dead, because his death had completed the work of redemption. As he died to rescue me from sin, so may his risen life empower mine, to live and work to your praise and glory.

I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Bible Reading – 1st letter of Peter Chapter 2 verses 19 – 25

Too often the Christian life is preached as the end of all our troubles and the passport to a life free from care. Peter is more realistic, and reminds us that our Lord went the route of suffering first. He "left us an example." The word that is used comes from when we were learning to write. Teacher would write the word neatly, and we tried to copy as best we could. Jesus has left us just such a model of a patient life, a life of trust in God. More than that, his life which was given up *for* us, is also now

given to us, to make us whole and to make us new. We are restored to the Good Shepherd's flock.

Hymn Today's Psalm is the familiar Psalm 23 (The Lord is my Shepherd)
There are many hymns which are versions of this psalm. Use one that appeals to you.
In Hymns and Psalms you will find 43, 44, 69, 70, 263.
In Singing the Faith you will find 479, 480, 481.
In Mission Praise you will find 649, 660, 1008

Bible Reading – John chapter 10 verses 1 – 11

"I am the good Shepherd," said Jesus, almost an echo of the opening of Psalm 23. In most Bibles the psalm begins, "The LORD is my shepherd," the capital letters indicating that God's 'proper' name is there, the name that means "I am"; so we might read it as "*I am* is my shepherd," and then we notice how very similar it is to what Jesus said.

This chapter follows without a break from the story we read a few weeks ago, of the curing of the man born blind. Jesus is highlighting how the true disciple *follows* him, and how he is worthy of our trust. He makes the contrast clear about those who might lead us astray.

These verses are probably a summary, a shortened version, of what Jesus said. They pick out the key thoughts, so that all who have answered the call of their Good Shepherd may 'chew the cud' of what he promises. It is the finest of green pastures for us to feed in!

Who do you follow?

That isn't a question about Twitter or other social media (if you don't know what that means, don't worry! A Teenager can explain it to you!). Neither is it about your favourite football team, or pop-star.

Some different examples might make it clear.

When the doctor prescribes a course of medicine, you are unlikely to get better unless you follow the prescription. If you want the cake to turn out right, you follow the recipe. If you are assembling DIY furniture you follow the instructions. If you are trying to find a place you don't know, you follow the directions. If you are learning to play a musical instrument your teacher will show you how to play and then you follow their example.

Cedric Robinson was, for 56 years, the Queen's Guide across Morecambe Bay. Each morning he would assess the safe route, avoiding the quick-sands and the strong currents. He marked out the course. He led parties over. Only the reckless and the foolish ignored him, and failed to follow.

Have you *followed* me in these examples?

The Christian disciple (the sheep) pays attention to the teaching, and to the example, and to the directions that Jesus, our Good Shepherd sets

before us. He is the one who “leads me in paths of righteousness (or right paths)” If you find yourself in the wrong place, you can be certain that he did not lead you there.

He calls them by name; they hear and recognize his voice. Douglas Macmillan was a shepherd before becoming a minister. In his book *The Lord our Shepherd* he tells some remarkable and illuminating stories, drawing on his experience. On one occasion when he was home from University he went to feed the sheep. His voice was so like his brother’s that they were able to fool his fiancée over the phone. But when he called the sheep they totally ignored him. Just like Jesus said, “A stranger they will not follow... for they do not know a stranger’s voice.”

Most of us will remember times at school or at work – and possibly at church, too – where the person speaking to us clearly does not know who we are. They don’t “call us by name,” and that suggests that we don’t matter to them. (I still recall getting a letter from a member of staff during my first days at university that used my wrong Christian name. I was very impressed when, a few days later, he apologized to me, in person, for having used the wrong name.) Jesus knows us by name; just like he could address Zacchaeus by name (Luke 19 v5) or Saul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9 v4), or more significantly Mary in the Garden (John 20 v16).

We are told in Matthew 9 v36 that Jesus had compassion on the crowds, because they were harassed and helpless, “*like sheep without a shepherd*”. It is a striking image to use, and we may feel it describes our world today, and a society which seems to drift aimlessly.

It is by Jesus that we go in and out, between the shelter of the fold and the lushness of the pasture. I hope that nobody takes the language so literally that they think of Jesus as a wooden door, any more than “I am the light of the world” turns him into a candle. He is the way (like in John 14 v6) – going in and out in harmony with his will for our life, and matching up with his teaching. That is the abundant life for which our Good Shepherd laid down his life. In his resurrection we see the promise of eternal life. In fellowship with him, the Living One, we have eternal life.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Good Shepherd of the flock for which you laid down your life, we pray to you for those harassed and distressed, like sheep who have no shepherd.

We pray for those who find no purpose in life, yet struggle with the pressures and anxieties like the rest of us.

We pray for those who have little power of resistance when faced with temptation, and no route to forgiveness and peace when they have given way.

We pray for those harassed in public service, and particularly the health professionals, who sometimes feel overwhelmed by the scale of the problems facing them.

We pray for those burdened with responsibility, for parents and carers looking after children, for staff in care homes and nursing homes, for public services faced with larger tasks and short-staffed with colleagues self-isolating.

We pray for the Government and their advisors in decision-making, and for the Opposition challenging them constructively to keep on the right track.

We pray for those who, during lock-down, are tempted to wander out of the safe pastures and away from the secure fold.

We pray for those who no longer recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd, that they would tune-in once again to the voice they have forgotten.

We pray for ourselves and for our loved ones. May we always listen for the call of Christ, and not be led astray by a stranger, a thief or a robber. May we follow him to the green pastures where our souls may be fed and our spirits refreshed.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn *This joyful Eastertide* (H&P 213 StF 314) or some other hymn of faith and commitment

Not in Mission Praise: perhaps try 901 *Now is Christ risen from the dead* or 74 *Christ is risen!*

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

Bible Readings for next Sunday:

John 14 verses 1 – 14

Acts 7 verses 55 – 60

Psalm 31 verses 1 -5, 15, 16

1st Peter 2 verses 2 - 10