

Order of Service Sunday 25th April

Welcome

The Lord is my good shepherd – and yours.
The Shepherd knows you –and he knows me.
Come and walk with him beside still waters.
Come and have your soul restored

Hymn All people that on earth do dwell

Prayers

Spirit of love, we belong to you.

In every breath we take we belong to you, because it was you who first breathed life into us. Every time someone calls our name, we belong to you, because it was you who welcomed us when we were first given our name. You have said, 'You are mine' and claimed us as your own.

Loving God, we worship you.

Spirit of love, we belong to you.

Whenever we hold hands we belong to you, because unless you hold us by the hand we are nothing. Whenever we are hugged or held we belong to you, because you hold on to us, even when we are angry, or selfish, or wrong. You cherish us and hold us dear, and have a role for us to play. Loving God, we worship you.

Spirit of love, we belong to you.

Let us never forsake you who love us in Jesus. **Amen**

Readings John 10:11-18

Psalm 23 (a musical version)

Reflection

The image of a good shepherd can seem quite cosy. We see lots of nice pictures which can reinforce this view. Reference to a bible dictionary those paints a very different picture.



The duties of a shepherd in an unenclosed country like Palestine were very onerous. "In early morning he led forth the flock from the fold, marching at its head to the spot where they were to be pastured. Here he watched them all day, taking care that none of the sheep strayed, and if any for a time eluded his watch and wandered away from the rest, seeking diligently till he found and brought it back. In those lands sheep require to be supplied regularly with water, and the shepherd for this purpose has to guide them either to some running stream or to wells dug in the wilderness and furnished with troughs. At night he brought the flock home to the fold, counting them as they passed under the rod at the door to assure himself that none were missing. Nor did his labours always end with sunset. In 1 Samuel we read how he might have to guard the fold through the dark hours from the attack of wild beasts, or the wily attempts of the prowling thief.

Also, it is true that shepherds were viewed with disdain in first-century Palestine, and the prophet Ezekiel, in the eighth century BC, showed no more respect for Israel's shepherds (Ch. 34), the leaders who were supposed to look after God's flock. So there's an irony in Jesus' term 'good shepherd' just as there is in the phrase 'good Samaritan'. People didn't expect shepherds or Samaritans to be good. It's a bit like saying, 'I am the good politician/ banker/ telesales rep/ traffic warden' today.

So when Jesus talks about being a good shepherd he is hardly using an image that the people listening to him would have expected. So what is he trying to say?

One thing is clear about the way shepherds cared for their flock and that is they would do whatever it takes to ensure their safety. The sheep would be counted in every evening and searched for if they were lost. A successful shepherd would have developed a strong relationship with the flock and know each sheep.

Jesus models what good shepherding is like. The shepherd shows the cost of caring by laying down his life. The shepherd knows us. The shepherd is inherently good. The shepherd is faithful to his

sheep – he doesn't abandon them (us) when life gets tough. The shepherd is faithful to, and keeps in close contact with, God. The shepherd is in control. The shepherd searches out the lost. We are called on to mirror these attributes and create a loving and supportive community and we can't do that if we don't care for ourselves as well.

One thing that the shepherd would have had is time, time to sit and reflect, time to contemplate and time to pray.

As our world opens up again some of us are beginning to realise how much we have appreciated the additional time that lockdown gave us and so as we think of what it truly means when Jesus says "I am the good shepherd" let us take a few moments to reflect on Jesus OUR shepherd who enables us to be part of HIS community.

*I do not know what it is like to be a sheep,
but I know what it is like to need a shepherd,
a good shepherd, a gentle shepherd, a reliable shepherd.*

*I know what it is like to need protection
from the wolves of other people's demands and expectations,
and from the even more vicious wolves that howl within me:
pride, fear, bitterness, loneliness.*

*I know what it is to long for the green pastures of being cherished
and valued, and to be haunted by the fear of the abattoir of
despair that all that I trusted and put my faith in leads only to
futility and death.*

*Lord Jesus, I do not know what it is like to be a sheep. But I know
you are my good shepherd and rejoice as you carry me safely home
in your arms when I have strayed and re-unite me with the flock of
your great, great love*

.Amen

Prayers

Loving Lord, you are the good shepherd, looking out for your whole flock. We know that you know us each by name and so we pray for ourselves and for our world. There is so much that needs your love and care at the moment.

At this time when we continue to think of our Royal family as they mourn the loss of the Duke of Edinburgh we pray for all those who have lost someone dear to them. May they feel enfolded in your love.

In the week when the police officer responsible for the death of George Floyd is found guilty we pray for the families of both men and for all who feel a sense of injustice at the way they are treated because of the prejudice of others. May they feel enfolded in your love.

Our world is starting open up again and we are able to do more things and see more people, but some will be feeling unsure and nervous, not ready to re enter communities they once enjoyed. May they feel enfolded in your love.

There are still so many who's future is unclear as the effects of the pandemic continue to impact so many lives. We give thanks for all the advances that have been made but we know that our new normal will involve big changes for many. May they feel enfolded in your love.

In a moment of silence we name now all those known to us who need to be enfolded in your love.

We bring all our prayers together in the words you taught us.

Lord's Prayer

Offering

Living God accept these offerings we bring to You in a whole variety of ways. Grant that they may go where we can't go, that they may reach where we cannot reach, that they may do what we cannot do.

Use them to strengthen Your Church and advance Your kingdom here where we are and far beyond for Jesus' sake.

Amen

Hymn God is Love, his the care!

Blessing

In the name of the Good Shepherd, who sacrificed his all for the good of his flock, let us go onward from this worship.

In the name of the Good Shepherd, who calls us to sacrifice for the good of his flock, let us go onward from this worship.

And as he drives us on, may we know his presence with us, night and day; now and always.

Amen.