

A service for 3rd May 2020

Jesus the Good Shepherd

Note: The hymn numbers are from "Singing the Faith" the current hymnbook of the Methodist Church, you will need to look them up if your Church uses a different book. I have also put links into YouTube for the hymns, my choice might not be yours, so by all means look for alternatives.

Bible Reading: Psalm 23

Hymn 479: The King of love my shepherd is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1OeQfkVyl>

Prayers *Creator God, who breathed the world into existence, we praise and adore you on this Spring Sunday morning, as we see signs of new life around us, we celebrate the world you have given to us. Help us not to take you for granted and complain to you when things are not the way we would like them to be. Help us to celebrate your world, to be appreciative of all that you offer to us and to worship you on this your day. Amen*

God of love, you have led us into the ways of light, forgive us when we have chosen to walk in the darkness, forgive us for when we have not acted with love, when our words have hurt others and even when our thoughts have been impure. We pray that you will cleanse us through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen

Collect for the day

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 that which is well-pleasing in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Bible Reading Acts 2: 42-47

I guess that anyone who has been a parent will remember the day that they brought their new-born child home for the first time, I remember all too well hoping and praying that Karen would instinctively know what to do with this tiny being and feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility of what lay ahead of us, not for a few days, but for the rest of our lives. We had collective responsibility for this new little human being, and I guess we felt totally inadequate for the task, perhaps thirty-one years later we still do.

As a church we will be celebrating the day of Pentecost in just four weeks' time, I can imagine the feeling of the disciples as Jesus poured out his Spirit on them, the Spirit they had been waiting for. It is in response to the gift of the Spirit that Peter speaks out boldly and we can only assume the exhilaration he must have felt as he progressed in the power of the Spirit. We do well to remember that Jesus tasked Peter to take care of the sheep, to be the new minister to the Church, which was now rapidly growing.

This was a big ask of the first disciples, they didn't come at this with a theology degree, or marketing experience, like parents of a new-born baby, they were left making the rules up as they went along. I think that we can learn from their approach. They were united in their work and mission, they were individuals, but of one mind, they shared with those in need, they had a social heart and would share what they had, recognising what they had and using it for the common good. They broke bread with glad and thankful hearts, appreciating the good gifts God had given to them and day by day they welcomed new people into their number.

Consider:

We are at a critical time in the life of the Church of Christ today, unlike the disciples of old, we can not meet day by day, we can not share in meals together, things look different.

- *How might the early Church have responded in this current age and time?*
- *How might we best serve God where we are and with what we have to offer?*

Hymn 513: Take this moment, sign and space <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbZ6gGG0V-o>

Epistle 1 Peter 2: 19-25

One of the biggest challenges of these current days seems to be that we are used to having freedom of choice, to do what we want to do when we want to do it, go where we want to go, when we want to go there, to see who we want to see when we want to see them. We value our freedom and the choices we have. With very little warning that has all been stripped away from us and we now don't have those choices anymore and worse still, we don't know when all this will end.

We can perhaps relate well to the readers of Peter's letter, because it is written primarily to those who are slaves. Maybe our view of slaves is informed by the slave trade in many parts of the world, but in Peter's time, slavery was a bit different, there is believed to have been over six million slaves, serving the Romans, there would have been professional people who were owned by the mighty and powerful and had no rights of their own.

It is into this context that Peter writes that it is to their credit to suffer for God, why? Because Jesus himself had done no wrong, he didn't deserve what happened to him, he bore our sins on his own body so that free from sin, we might live in righteousness, by his wounds, we are healed.

Consider:

Even in our modern world there are those who bear physical and mental pain, who are held in modern forms of slavery, who have maybe never known the freedom that we are grieving the loss of.

- *At a time when we have lost so much, think about what we have retained.*
- *Reflect for a moment about what is really important in your own life.*

Prayer

In these days of lock down and isolation where life feels to be difficult and lonely for so many, try to be still and silent for a few moments.

Pray for the Church of Christ, that as the people of the world live with the threat of Covid 19 the Church of Christ still seeks to be light in a darkened world. Pray that we might all be ready to journey in new ways, that others might know the light of Christ in their lives.

Pray for the people of the world, remember that the Coronavirus is not the only news story, people still seek refuge in other countries, many dying on the way, wars still rage, dictators still flex their muscles and people still live in slavery. Pray for all those who live in fear.

Pray for our own country, our government, our NHS workers and all those in key roles in our nation, putting their own health at risk, so that others can be looked after. Pray for those who struggle with the lockdown, because of their own health issues. Remember the family and friends affected by the double stabbing in East London, where two children died on Sunday evening.

Pray for people who find themselves isolated, remembering particularly those who find themselves in dark places, separated from those they love particularly at difficult times in their lives. Remember the people on our prayer list this week.

Pray for those who have lost loved ones, remembering the many people who died due to causes other than the pandemic. Remember those who are not getting the opportunity to say goodbye and can't have funeral services to celebrate the lives of those they have lost.

Finally, pray that God will strengthen you to cope with this difficult time and that you may feel the power of his risen life in you today. Amen

The Lord's prayer:

Hymn 660: Called by Christ to be disciples <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXQSh2iTj2I>

Gospel: John 10: 1-10





We saw the little lamb in the picture on the left above, when we were driving out to Elmsett recently, we are drawn in by the cute little face of a still infant lamb, but I think that the barbed wire above it's head causes me to cringe that the lovely little face could so easily be damaged and somewhere in the beautiful cuteness we see something sinister at work.

The picture on the right above is the fairly familiar image of Jesus the good shepherd, often seen recreated as a thing of beauty in stained glass. It creates a cosy feeling of Jesus, who is there to look after the flock, to look after us. A lot of painting of this nature come from the eighteenth and nineteenth century and have a kind of romance depicting the pastoral Jesus.

The Gospel according to St John, takes an interesting turn with this reading, if you have a quick flick back to chapter nine, you will read the story of the man born blind and how John recognises the shift from darkness to light for the man, paralled with the shift from light to darkness for the Pharisees. What we don't know who the audience is, but as the Jews were divided by his words in verses 19-21 we can assume that this is being adressed to them.

So why does Jesus adress them in this way? The Jews have just cast the man born blind out of the temple and they were seeking justification from Jesus. The difference in what Jesus is telling them is that he is saying that he will lead the sheep out into pasture, he will show them the way to the ruth. Maybe while we are penned in, for our own safety and there is much talk about our release, it is good to remember that the good shepherd goes before us and leads the way, our task is to follow

Consider

Jesus told Peter that he'd had the freedom to go where he wanted, but the time would come where people would take him where he didn't want to go.

- *Reflect on times in your own when God has led you in ways you had not intended to go, how easy was it to trust in him?*
- *How do you feel today? are you still prepared to follow in the current situation?*

Hymn 156

From the breaking of the dawn <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6PSsTq0YD8>

Some words are slightly different to the ones in the hymnbook

Prayer

*Lord have mercy on us,
Come and heal our land.
Cleanse with your fire, heal with your touch,
Humbly we bow and call upon You now.
O Lord, have mercy on us,
O Lord, have mercy on us.*

*Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Amen.