



Call: (Ps 23 vv 1-3) The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside green waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.

Prayer: Glory to God the Father, whose goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life. Glory to God the Son, the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep by name, and who calls us by name to come into his divine presence.

Glory to God the Spirit, who guides us in the way of Christ and gathers us into his Church.

Lord, we know what we want and we want it now. We will follow any new fad to get it; or any stranger. Forgive us, good shepherd, when we wander off. Bring us back to where we know and are truly known.

Lord, we know where we want to go. And sometimes, we don’t mind treading on a few toes to get there, even trying to get ahead of our leader.

Forgive us, good shepherd, when we wander off. Bring us back to where we know and are truly known.

We think we know who we are, but only you, Lord, truly know us.

Forgive us, good shepherd, when we wander off. Bring us back to where we know and are truly known.

Thank you God, that in you we have the safety and security of your abundant forgiveness. Just as the wool from our favourite jumper can hold us tight and surround us with warmth and well-being, so does your forgiveness wrap us in security and new hope. AMEN

Hymn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4ox4es1jo8>

STF 51

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not,
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided -
great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Summer and winter, and spring-time and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Chorus

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Thomas O Chisholm (1866-1960) Copyright © 1923, renewal 1951 Hope Publishing Company. 11 10 11 10
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Reading: The Good Shepherd and His Sheep John 10:1-10 (NIV) “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you.
Allelu, alleluia.

Ask and it shall be given unto you,
seek and ye shall find;
knock and the door shall be opened up to you.
Allelu, alleluia.

We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God.
Allelu, alleluia.

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Message: “Knowing and being known”

We have some very cuddly looking sheep in the field next to our house. I did consider recording my message today sat in the field, but suspected the sheep would scatter and run away, for one reason they would not recognise my voice.

I hope you will have realised that theme for today is shepherds and sheep.

I remember going to our local agricultural show and watching a display on sheep shearing. Apparently the trick is to get hold of the seep and turn her on her back so that all four legs are in the air. She then stops struggling as she has no idea of how to roll over and run away. (This is potentially dangerous for sheep if they find themselves laying on their backs, as they don't know how to roll over).

However sheep are not necessarily as stupid as we might think. Today in western farmland, shepherds drive around on quad bikes and have sheepdogs. In the Middle East, even to this day apparently, the shepherd does not rely on 4 wheels or even a canine friend.

Rather than pastureland, painted in the 23rd Psalm, the land is rocky, dusty, with little lush grass to eat. The sheep therefore have to wander in search of food. The shepherd is on constant watch. Because sheep are mainly used for wool rather than meat, they have longer lives, and so the shepherd gets to know each individual sheep and each sheep gets to know her shepherd. She recognises his voice, his tone, his behaviour. The shepherd does not have to herd the sheep from behind, he simply leads and they follow. For instance, if the sheep need to cross a stream, the shepherd crosses first with a lamb across his shoulders and then the mother and the remaining flock follow.

There is this close relationship between shepherd and sheep. The shepherd knows each sheep, their characteristics, both physical and behavioural; and in turn the sheep know their shepherd, their guardian. They will not respond to a strangers voice, even if they are called.

In our Bible passage Jesus uses the imagery of the shepherd and his sheep. The first five verses are a little confusing – the Pharisees certainly find it so. Jesus appears to be describing himself as the shepherd, with the gatekeeper opening the gate for him. He also describes how anyone trying to get in over the walls is a thief or a robber.

I wonder who is the gatekeeper?
Do we sometimes try to get in “via the backdoor”?

If we look back in John's Gospel to chapter 9, we read of the story of how Jesus healed a blind man, and the religious leaders quizzed the man, trying to find out who it was that had restored his sight. And if we read on to chapter 11 we read of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

It would seem therefore that this passage about the shepherd and the gatekeeper is an attempt to illustrate how Jesus is truly is the Messiah, he truly is the One sent from God – but they don't get it.

So Jesus tries another way – I am the gate.

Sheepfolds in the Middle East consisted of brick walls with one entry. There was no door at the entrance, the shepherd, literally was the gate – to keep sheep in and intruders out. He would lay himself across the entrance, but before that he would use his rod, like a shepherd's crook to lay low over the entrance so that only one sheep could go in at a time. The shepherd would then inspect each sheep to note any injuries or deformities. So the shepherd was constantly vigilant, making sure none of the sheep wandered off, he was never off duty. He was fearlessly courageous, fighting off wild animals and potential thieves and he was also patiently loving- the sheep were his top priority, even if they were a little bit stupid at times.

So how does this apply to us?

Jesus is the gate, the only way in or out. If we try and “get in” by climbing over the walls we will fail.

Have you ever tried to make out your child's voice in a crowded room? It's quite probable that you would be able to find them, but imagine in a crowd of hundreds or thousands?

Some years ago I visited an island off Mull, in Scotland where thousands of puffins and gannets lived. It was amazing to see the adults birds fly in and immediately locate their hungry and crying offspring. It's well known that adult penguins can locate their chicks easily in a tightly huddled group of thousands of identical looking penguins.

Jesus knows each of us by name, he knows each of us intimately, what our worries, our hopes and dreams are. He is like that shepherd, constantly vigilant, never off duty. We can come to him at any time, he will let us in through the gate. Each of us is his top priority.

Jesus is like the shepherd who leads from the front. We can be confidently safe and secure following him. Just as those sheep feel safe and secure and are able to come and go through the gate, so we can live a life with Jesus and feel absolutely safe and secure. We may still have to face dangers and difficulties but he will bring out the best in us and we can fully trust in him.

Considerations:

What does it mean to you to know and to be known?

How does it feel to know that Jesus knows each of us intimately?

Do you feel safe and secure in today's world, with Jesus as the shepherd and the gate?

Let us pray: Thank you Jesus that you are the shepherd who leads his sheep, thank you that you are the gate through which we can be safe and secure. Help us to put our trust wholly in you, and so live life and have it to the full. AMEN

Hymn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi1-5kmbkyQ>

STF 531

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
what a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations,
is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged:
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness:
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge:
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
in his arms he'll take and shield you,
you will find a solace there.

Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819-1886) 8 7 8 7 D

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Prayers: The Lord is our shepherd, and we are his sheep. Let us bring our cares and concerns to him.

Good shepherd of the sheep, we pray for your Church, for all the congregations and for all the Ministers and Leaders. We pray for clear guidance and direction in those issues that concern us, asking not for an easy way but the way that is right and good.

Good shepherd of the sheep, we pray for the world we inhabit – the world we have inherited and which we will pass on to successive generations. Teach us how to look after it carefully, to acknowledge the damage and destruction brought about by our actions and our inaction and to put right those things we have done wrong.

Good shepherd of the sheep, we pray for our local communities, for our friends and families. We ask not for popularity at all costs, but the grace to do your will and be your witnesses to what it means to live lovingly, both when it is easy and also when it hurts.

Good shepherd of the sheep, we pray for the weak and the vulnerable, for those who must live depending on others for their every need. We pray for those who are marginalised and unloved. We pray for greater willingness to uphold and encourage one another. We pray for healing and wholeness.

Good shepherd of the sheep, we pray for those who have died, and for those who ache with sorrow. We commend them all to your unfailing care which lasts throughout this life and for all eternity.

Good shepherd of the sheep, we give thanks that in you we are able to live through good and ill with abundance of life. AMEN

Hymn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MG0>

STF 481

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone.
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

Refrain

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

Refrain

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Blessing: (Ps 23 v 6) Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. AMEN