



Hymn: StF 28 Jesus calls us here to meet him Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ModYoPReYYw>

Jesus calls us here to meet him
as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise ;
praise the Son who calls us friends ;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.

Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of life and Lord of all,
sharer of our flesh and frailness,
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story ;
tell his tales that all may hear ;
tell the world that Christ in glory

came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to each other,
vastly different though we are ;
creed and colour, class and gender
neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger ;
join the hands of age and youth ;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)
Words & Music: 1989 WGRG, c/o Iona Community,
Glasgow, Scotland (Admin. by Wild Goose Resource Group)
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Prayers

Jesus, we gather in your presence whether that be in the flesh or through a virtual internet connection. You call us to meet with you and so we come, united by you across time and space. Not only that but you connect us to the presence of your Father both now and through all eternity.

We thank you and we praise you that, as we have sung, you are the Word of Life sent to bring us truth and you are the Lord of all, enthroned on high who will one day come again. As we await that day, we yearn for your truth to be spoken into our lives that we might grow closer to you, closer to each other and more aware of our part in the spreading of your Kingdom.

We confess that sometimes we have been slow to respond to your call. You shared our flesh and frailness, yet we have been reluctant to enter into the frailness and suffering of the world. You have called us to mix with all people in your name, sometimes people vastly different to ourselves; yet there have been times when we have shut you out and preferred the company of our own kind. You call us to take your story of good news and tell it to the world, yet we have been fearful of how people might treat us if we do. Forgive us, we pray, and in this time together, may our hearts be set ablaze once again through the fire-lighting of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn: StF 481 The Lord's my Shepherd Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upRoR7ej9Ns>

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.

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.

Reading: Luke 15 v. 1-7

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

Message: "Have a Heart!"

Have you noticed that, several times in the gospels, Jesus makes a point about something by telling a story or offering up a saying and does so in two alternative forms – one a female version and one a male version. He wants to illustrate persistence in prayer so he tells us about a widow seeking justice from a corrupt judge and also about a man knocking up their neighbour in the middle of the night because company has arrived unexpectedly and he wants to borrow some bread. One male, one female.

Jesus wants to illustrate the rapidly growing Kingdom of God so he tells one story about a man sowing mustard seeds and another about a woman kneading dough. One male, one female. And there are two small stories in Luke 15 about one thing from a larger collection being lost and found. We heard about a man losing and finding a sheep and, had we continued to the verses immediately afterwards, we also have a story about a woman losing and finding one of ten coins.

Why does Jesus do this? The best guess is because he wants to maximise the possibility of people gossiping it on. In a society where men tended to socialise with men and women with women, the male version of the story was more likely to be passed around the male circles and the female around the female. Thus, whenever you find Jesus saying the same thing in two different ways, think! What is so important here that Jesus wants to really underline it and have it talked about?

Do you remember, from the back end of 2023, the story of Fiona the sheep? Fiona was stranded at the foot of a cliff in Scotland. Kayakers reported seeing her but there were no paths or roads to reach her nor was a rescue possible from the water. The local farmer assessed the situation but decided that the risks involved in trying to rescue her outweighed the potential benefit. She was, after all, reported as being fit and healthy and had access to grass and fresh water.

Those initial sightings were from 2021 or thereabouts and Fiona stayed where she was for a couple of years until, finally, a group of local farmers got together and decided to attempt the precarious rescue. By now Fiona was being hailed in the press as Britain's woolliest sheep having amassed three years or so of growth. You can, if you want to, watch the rescue on YouTube as she is bundled into a bag and carefully winched back up to the top of the cliff. As I looked back at the old news stories to remind myself of the story of Fiona's rescue, I was interested to read some of the comments left by fellow readers.

Someone calling themselves DDGibbs asked the question as to whether Fiona really did want to be rescued or if she was an introvert looking for solitude who had now been returned to her idea of hell. LeftkayoBaka responded that even introverts get lonely whilst Er1nf0rd61 took a different approach.

"Didn't anyone think that it might have 'got rid' of the other sheep? Britain's loneliest sheep might be a crazed psychotic serial killer - pushed the rest of the flock off the island so it could be the sole survivor. And now we've brought it to the mainland."

To which, of course, others responded that she always had been on the mainland.

Eventually, though, sanity prevailed with the conclusion being reached that sheep are flock animals and, therefore, to be on your own like that could be psychologically damaging even if you did have all your physical needs satisfied. Sheep need to be connected to other sheep.

That story came to mind as I was reflecting on Jesus' parable about a lost sheep. We get the sense from the parable that this shepherd wasn't bothered about a risk versus reward analysis. He just wanted to recover the sheep that was lost. Indeed, I have heard the story told as pointing to a shepherd so unhealthily focused on recovering the one who is lost that he leaves the other 99 behind, all on their own in the open country. Then when he finds the lost sheep, he goes to his friends and neighbours, showing it joyfully to them to which they respond to him 'But what about the others?' That way of telling the story points us to a God whose overwhelming passion is for those who are lost and for their recovery. Whether it's on his shoulders or winched up a cliff side, God's heart is for bringing the lost sheep home. God's heart is for lost souls.

I'm not sure that I totally buy that interpretation of the story. With a hundred sheep to look after, it is most probable that the shepherd was not acting alone. He probably had at least one assistant to whom he could entrust the sheep while he was on his rescue mission. The picture of God's absolute passion, though, does ring true. The shepherd doesn't ask an assistant to do the searching. He is personally involved in looking for and bringing home the lost sheep and God is personally involved through Jesus and the Holy Spirit in looking for those lost in this world and bringing them back to his flock.

As human beings, God created us all for connection. We were created for a connection to other human beings, to be part of God's flock. And we were also created for a connection with God, the shepherd.

Here's the important point that Jesus wants to get across by double underlining it and hoping it would be gossiped on. It's the point he was driving home to those critical Pharisees and Teachers of the Law. Our God is a God of re-connection. That is where his heart lies. Nobody is too cut off from him that they cannot be re-connected.

Where does your heart lie? When you see the lonely and the isolated of this world, do you long to see them re-connected to humanity as God intended? When you see people struggling because they do not know God, do you long to see them re-connected? Do you share God's heart of compassion? Or do you need to go back and hear the words of the story again, and again, and again, and again. Until they finally begin to sink in.

For Reflection: For the One Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_bj6mjUj7k

Let me be filled
With Kindness, and compassion for the One
The One for whom You loved, and gave Your Son
For humanity; increase my love

A love that erases all the lines, and sees the truth
Oh that when they look in my eyes, they would see
You
Even in just a smile; they would feel the Father's love

Help me to love with open arms, like You do
A love that erases all the lines, and sees the truth
Oh that when they look in my eyes, they would see
You
Even in just a smile; they would feel the Father's love

Let all my life, tell of who You are
And the wonder of, Your never-ending love
Let all my life, tell of who You are
You're wonderful, and such a good Father

Oh how He loves us
From the homeless, to the famous, and in between
You formed us, You made us carefully
'Cause in the end; we're all Your children

Help me to love with open arms, like You do
A love that erases all the lines, and sees the truth
Oh that when they look in my eyes, they would see
You
Even in just a smile; they would feel the Father's love

So help me to love with open arms, like You do

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Prayers of Intercession : Lord God, we come before you as the shepherd of the flock.

You are the shepherd who leads us to green pastures and still waters and we pray for the peace that image conjures up in our minds. Peace within relationships and families; Peace within troubled minds; Peace within communities and neighbourhoods; Peace between peoples and nations; and Peace in all those areas of conflict within our world today. Bring your Peace, we pray.

You are the shepherd who renews our strength and we pray that renewal and strength for all those who are feeling weary today or who are struggling with ill health or sickness. Bring your renewal and healing, we pray.

You are the shepherd who guides us along right paths and in this difficult time for the world we pray for your guidance, your leadership and your vision. We pray that particularly for the world's political leaders but also for all those who exercise authority in positions of responsibility in every sphere of life. Bring your guidance, we pray.

You are the shepherd who goes with us through the valley of the shadow of death. We pray for all those who are facing death or going through the pain of bereavement. Bring the comfort of your presence we pray.

You are the shepherd who amply provides for us in the presence of our enemies. We pray for all those who are in special need of your provision today. Those in need of food or drink. Those in need of shelter and security. Those in need of a livelihood and regular income. Those in need of justice or a voice to speak out on their behalf. Bring them sustenance in their need, we pray.

And we pray for those who live permanently in the presence of their enemies because they know what it is to be persecuted for their faith in you. We pray that you may strengthen their resolve; grant them your protection and that the atmosphere of persecution may be lessened around them. Bring them the strength they need to stand firm, we pray.

Finally, as your sheep we bring you our personal needs and prayers. You always know what is best for us and so we pray that your will may be done in our lives. Fill us with your heart of compassion; help us to see and to care about the disconnection all around us; and use us as your hands, feet and voice, to speak your love to a world in need. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer : Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your 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 yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: StF 673 Will You Come and Follow Me? Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu7ihXeTsMQ>

Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?

Will you let me answer prayer

in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?

Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?

Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found

to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and
sound
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps
show.

Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me

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