

Sunday Worship  
21<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

**I am the good shepherd.** (John 10:11, 14)

**I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.** {John 10:10}

Opening Prayer

Faithful God,  
We gather bringing our hungry hearts.  
**Help us to rise up and follow.**

We come to find rest and life.  
**Help us to rise up and follow.**

We come to drink the living water that is Christ your Son.  
**Help us to rise up and follow.**

We come to be filled with your compassion and mercy.  
**Help us to rise up and follow.**

**Life abundant,  
God of grace,  
You call us by name  
to live without fear.  
In peace may we resist  
all who despoil people,  
that their hearts might be turned  
to the gateway, the Good Shepherd,  
our only source of life.  
Amen**

To God be the glory!  
great things He has done;  
so loved he the world  
that He gave us His Son;  
who yielded his life  
an atonement for sin,  
and opened the life-gate  
that all may go in.

***Praise the Lord, praise the Lord!  
let the earth hear His voice;  
praise the Lord, praise the Lord!  
let the people rejoice:  
O Come to the Father,  
through Jesus the Son  
and give Him the glory;  
great things he hath done.***

Great things he hath taught us,  
great things he hath done,  
and great our rejoicing  
through Jesus the Son;  
but purer and higher,  
and greater will be  
our wonder, our rapture,  
when Jesus we see.

***Praise the Lord, praise the Lord!  
let the earth hear His voice;  
praise the Lord, praise the Lord!  
let the people rejoice:  
O Come to the Father,  
through Jesus the Son  
and give Him the glory;  
great things he hath done.***

{Francis Jane Alstynne 1820-1915}

Brothers and sisters, the Good Shepherd calls us to turn away from sin and be faithful to His voice. As we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, we renew our confidence in trust through His mercy.

God our Father,  
we come to you in sorrow for our sins.

For turning away from you,  
and ignoring your will for our lives;  
Father, forgive us.

**Save us and help us.**

For behaving just as we wish,  
without thinking of you;  
Father, forgive us.

**Save us and help us.**

For failing you by what we do,  
and think and say;  
Father, forgive us.

**Save us and help us.**

For letting ourselves be drawn away from you  
by temptations in the world about us;  
Father, forgive us.

**Save us and help us.**

For living as if we were ashamed  
to belong to your Son;  
Father, forgive us.

**Save us and help us.**

The Lord enrich us with his grace,  
and nourish us with his blessing;  
the Lord defend us in trouble and keep us from all evil;  
the Lord accept our prayers  
and absolve us from our offences,  
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our saviour.

**Amen**

Reading      Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
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.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
As it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever.  
Amen**

We affirm our faith in God.

**In the shadow of Your wings  
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.**

The Lord is our Light, our salvation;  
The Lord is our refuge of our life;

**In the shadow of Your wings  
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.**

We believe we shall receive the goodness  
of the Lord in the land of the living.

**In the shadow of Your wings  
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.**

We believe and trust in God the Father;  
source of all being and life.

**In the shadow of Your wings  
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.**

We believe and trust in God the Son;  
Who took our human nature.

**In the shadow of Your wings  
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.**

We believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit;  
who gives life to the people of God.

**In the shadow of Your wings  
I will sing Your praises, O Lord.**

This is the faith of the Church.  
**We believe and trust in one God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
Amen**

## Reading John 10: 1-18

Truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again, Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

This is the Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God.**

Talk

To understand “I am the good shepherd” it is helpful to know a little bit about the way shepherds and sheep worked in ancient Israel. Sheep were important. Even the poorest family would own at least one sheep. Their wool, meat and fat a good source of income. A family with no sheep were extremely vulnerable.

In central Israel there is an upland plateau. A remote fertile area. With deep ravines. Several shepherds would graze their flocks in this place. With no hedges or gates the sheep were free to wander. However, straying onto another shepherd’s piece of land meant that shepherd could claim that sheep for himself.

The shepherd in Jesus’ time required deep knowledge in order to learn considerable skills. The relationship grew from mutual trust. A trust that would have taken time to develop. The sheep needed to learn their shepherd’s voice against other shepherds sharing the same feeding ground. They needed to trust their shepherd would look for them when they wandered off. Would rescue them when they fell over the edge. Would care for wounds caused from loose pebbles and rocks. Didn’t end there.

There were the dark nights to get through. Only on clear nights would the stars and moon be company. At nightfall the shepherd would call his flock into their sheepfold. Then he would lay across the gateway to protect them from lurking predators. Come the morning their shepherd would rise up and lead his flock from the sheepfold. This was the cycle of life. The togetherness vital for survival and well-being. All this meant people could grasp the goodness that came from “I am the Good Shepherd”.

Is it acceptable to say our modern lifestyles with its high urbanisation distracts our attention?

When we moved to Norfolk, our son was 14. For two weeks he and his sister cycled around the countryside. In his first term EDP ran a poetry competition, titled “Norfolk” Much to his new class mates’ annoyance, he won first prize. The reason was simply with fresh eyes he saw what they had stopped noticing.

This is true of the goodness of the shepherd that is Christ. Caught up in the business of doing. Zooming around our screens. My dairy used to be well organised. Date, time and meeting data. Now its jumbled up with IDs and Password numbers. Not helpful with my Dyscalculia. If I am not careful, I end up muddling along.

In this place it can be easy to forget life is about following Christ. In the fuzziness it can be easy to lose sight that each and every one of us is precious and important to Christ. In all the different comings and goings, without actually leaving by the front door, we can forget to ask Christ to guide us through whatever the day will bring. "I am" that belongs to Christ is brought to our attention. We hear "truly." Then to make sure we have heard that Christ speaks the truth; "very truly". Not maybe, perhaps, possibly. But, very truly. The absolute certainty when we wake up and go to sleep and all the in-betweens, we can trust Christ will stand between us and whatever we are facing.

Interestingly David has no issue with describing himself as a sheep. He is content to tell us we are all sheep. Not very flattering. Except the idea sheep do not have to contribute anything to the relationship. All we have to do is lie down. When we hear our Good Shepherd's voice, we get up and follow. All the responsibility of finding pasture and water lies with the Good Shepherd.

Except a disciple's life alternates between being a shepherd and a sheep. Whichever the moment presents itself we are united by the grace that flows from the Good Shepherd. Not quite doing nothing. The goodness of discipleship requires that developing relationship towards mutual trust. So that when we are the shepherd we know we will receive the strength and confidence of genuine faith. When we are a sheep we can trust we hear the truth.

Jesus is well aware of the false shepherds. Those who enter our happy existence through scams and social media. Those who infiltrate the good order with anti- information on this and that. The clashing of angry and frustrated voices. Invaders of peaceful vigils turn the tide into protests.

When we lie down to rest, we pray for watchful protection through our compline prayer:

Before the ending of the day,  
Creator of the world, we pray  
that you, with steadfast love, would keep  
Your watch around us while we sleep.

Come the morning we ask for Christ's guidance:

The night has passed and the day lies open before us;  
As we rejoice in this new day,

so may the light of your presence, O God,  
set our hearts on fire with love for you.

This assurance is voiced by David. “surely goodness and love will follow me all my days”. Not maybe, probably but surely. Everything that David knows about being a shepherd and sheep are brought alive. He uses his knowledge and skills to convey the language of faith that belongs to God’s vocabulary of grace.

Readings touch all of us in one way or other. Longing God will come and lay down his life on the sacrificial soil. Remove our burdens. Bring us back to comfortable safe living. Also that the Good Shepherd is Christ’s earthy life. A visible demonstration of the divine restoration of harmony and good order.

Here we are a visible shepherd. The first day of Spring that brings leaves, colours, smells and all manner of new growth. A time we live through knowing we will enter the summer which brings maturity. Followed by autumn which produces abundant harvest. After all the business of discipleship we arrive in winter for silent rest. These seasons of faith are our daily walk of living with the Good Shepherd.

In our sharing with Christ’s journey, we are assured we will enter through the eternal gate.

Our thanksgiving prayer for the Good Shepherd

A Song of David

Blessed are you, God of Israel,  
for ever and ever,  
for yours is the greatness, the power,  
The glory, the splendour and the majesty.

Everything in heaven and on earth is yours;  
Yours is the kingdom, O Lord,  
and you are exalted as head over all.

Riches and honour come from you and you rule over all.

In your hand are power and might;  
Yours it is to give power and strength to all.  
And now we give you thanks, O God,  
and praise your glorious name.

For all things come from you,  
And of your own have we given you.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son  
And to the Holy Spirit;  
As it was in the beginning is now  
And shall be for ever.  
Amen**

## Prayers

The Lord's my shepherd I shall not want:

**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, hang on to me.**

**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, fill me with your strength and peace.**

**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, I remember your love given to me through Jesus.**



He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

**We lift to you all who are unwell.**

*Pause*

**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, fill them with your hope and healing.**

**As I hold this cross, Lord, may they know your love through Jesus.**



Even though I walk through the darkest valley:

**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, hang on to me.**

**We pray for all who are troubled. Lonely. Lost.**

*Pause*

**As I hold this cross, Lord, fill them with your presence.**

**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, may they know your hope through Jesus.**

**As I hold onto this cross Lord, I pray for situations of injustices.**

*Pause.*



**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, may all people know your tolerant love.**

You prepare a table before me; you anoint my head with oil.

**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, I pray I am faithful.**

**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, I pray I use the gifts you have given to me.**



*Pause*

**As I hold on to this cross, Lord, may I be worthy to follow you.**

I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

**As I hold this cross, Lord, give me courage to follow you and strength to build bridges between divisions.**



*Pause*

We bring our prayers of rest, being sorry, repentance, refreshment and remaining with the Good Shepherd praying with confidence his prayer for us to The Father;

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen**

## Hymn

Colours of day dawn into the mind,  
The sun has come up,  
the night is behind.  
Go down in the city, into the street,  
and let's give the message  
to the people we meet.

*So light up the fire  
and let the flame burn,  
open the door, let Jesus return.  
Take seeds of His Spirit,  
let the fruit grow,  
tell the people of Jesus,  
let His love show.*

Go through the park, on into the town;  
the sun still shines on,  
it never goes down.  
The light of the world is risen again;  
the people of darkness  
are needing a friend.

*So light up the fire  
and let the flame burn,  
Open the door, let Jesus return.  
Take seeds of His Spirit,  
let the fruit grow,  
Tell the people of Jesus,  
let His love show.*

Open your eyes, look into the sky;  
The darkness has come,  
The sun came to die.  
The evening draws on,  
The sun disappears,  
but Jesus is living,  
And his Spirit is near.

*So light up the fire  
and let the flame burn,  
Open the door, let Jesus return.  
Take seeds of His Spirit,  
let the fruit grow,  
Tell the people of Jesus,  
let His love show.*

Closing Prayer and Blessing

**God of our pilgrimage,  
You have led us to the living water.  
Refresh and sustain us  
That when we come to the Good Shepherd  
we find His gate be open wide for us to enter with joy.  
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen**

And the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son  
And Holy Spirit, be with us all, those we love,  
And those we find difficult to love,  
today and in all our tomorrows.  
**Amen**

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
**Thanks be to God**