

## Sunday Worship for Palm Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2021



### I am the door of the Sheep (John 10: 7,9)

#### Gathering

Lord, you are in this place. This space. This togetherness. This enforced separation.

Your presence fills it.

Your presence is peace.

Your presence is in my heart.

Your presence fills it.

Your presence is peace.

Lord, you are in my mind.

Your presence fills it.

Your presence is peace.

## Reading from John 12: 12-16

### The Triumphal Entry

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him shouting "Hosanna!" Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel!"

Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written:

"Do not be afraid, O daughter of Zion, see your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt".

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him".

This is the Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God.**

Song:

Hosanna, Hosanna, hosanna in the highest.

Hosanna, Hosanna, in the highest:

Lord, we lift up your name,

With hearts full of praise.

Be exulted, O Lord my God,

Hosanna in the highest!

Glory, glory, glory to the King of Kings.

Lord we lift up your name,

With hearts full of praise.

Be exulted O Lord my God,

Hosanna in the highest!

Lord God, as we sing our 'Hosanna's' today, may we remember also that you were riding towards' the suffering and rejection, pain and humiliation, the cruel Cross. As we enter Holy Week let us look forward to the joy of Easter Day when you rose from death to reign forever.

Help us, as we daily lay our lives before you, to live the resurrection life that acknowledges Jesus as our Lord and King.

**Verily, verily I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. (John 10: 7)**

**Poem: I am the Door of the Sheepfold**



Not one that's gently hinged  
or deftly hung,  
Not like the ones you planed  
at Joseph's place,  
Not like the well-oiled  
openings that sumg  
So easily for Pilate's  
practised pace,  
Not like the ones that closed  
in Mary's face  
From house to house in  
brimming Bethlehem,

Not like the one that no man may assail,  
That waits your breaking in Jerusalem.

Not one you made, but one you have become:  
Load-bearing, balancing, a weighted beam  
To bridge the gap, to bring us within reach  
Of your high pasture. Calling us by name,  
You lay your body down across the breach,  
Yourself the door that opens into home.

Malcolm Guite

**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**

### **Gateway to Holy Week**

We are looking at two strands to our theme this week., building on Jesus’s ‘I am’ sayings found in the gospel of John - this week: I am the Door – and Jesus’s ‘triumphal entry’ into Jerusalem, which marks the entrance to Holy Week.

It would be good to have your palm crosses to hand as we take a moment to contemplate the meaning of ‘triumphal entry’, the heading of our Palm Sunday reading. Within a week, the cheers of the crowd have turned to jeers. ‘Triumph’ turned on its head, so it seems. How easily the crowd was swayed and manipulated! Human nature is innately fickle. Let’s admit we can all, at times, be fickle in our faith. The church acknowledges our temporal nature in a symbolic way, as our returned palm crosses will produce, through burning, the dust that is applied to our foreheads on Ash Wednesday: “You are dust and to dust you shall return”.

So, Jesus enters the city to die.

In last week’s talk the scene was set for the work of a shepherd and the nature of his flock, in a very pictorial way, which is helpful to understand the aptness of the analogy in Jesus’s statement “I am the Good Shepherd”.

Recently Ray and I watched the 'slow' TV recording of Lake District shepherds rounding up and guiding their scattered sheep from the high pasture down into the valley. It was a long, arduous task which required great patience and perseverance as they channelled them along the steep narrow path, constantly alert to those struggling with the journey, and the wayward ones deviating from the path; the ones who lost their way amid the scrubby undergrowth. Eventually they were all rounded up safely in the sheep pens. It was 2 hours of mesmerizing (and soporific) TV.

The practice of tending sheep is timeless; it hasn't changed that much in thousands of years. And so it provides a powerful image which courses through the Bible, still relevant today. When Jesus says, "I am the door", he refers to himself as the shepherd who gathers his sheep into the sheep fold to protect them. He positions himself at the entrance in order to guard his flock. His body is the first point of contact for predators: they will have to encounter him first.

Who, or what, I wonder, is **our** 'enemy at the door'?

One bright summer morning during our canal boat holiday I watched a shepherd calling his flock for breakfast. As he called them, they all recognized and responded to his familiar voice. He called and they followed. It was a joy to witness. "I know my own", says Jesus. Importantly for us, he then goes on to indicate that 'the fold' as envisaged by the Jews, had a much wider scope:

"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice".

We understand this as a 'heads up' that it is God's intention to include those outside Jesus's Jewish context. It is an open invitation for all to respond to his call to follow him.

In Biblical times the sheep stayed out on the high pasture during the summer, but in more inclement seasons were brought down to spend their time within the confines of the city where they were protected and safe. A few years ago we visited the ancient Greek city of Mycenae. Although now in ruins, you are still able

to enter the city through its imposing gateway where two enormous lions gaze down at you menacingly. The gatehouse would have housed watchmen or guardians of the city, ever vigilant to threats to the peace and security of the inhabitants – observing the 'goings out and the comings in'.

The gates of Jerusalem opened to Jesus that Palm Sunday. He fulfils the prophecy of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah:

“See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey”.

On entering, he began the process of opening the way to God through his death and resurrection. Jesus lays down his life for his sheep. He places himself at the sheepfold entrance in a sacrificial way. “Through him”, says Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, “We have access to the Father”.

So, this Palm Sunday we stand at the gate, the entrance to Holy Week, a year since we encountered an enemy at the gate in the form of COVID 19 – facing an uncertain future, but in the certain hope that 'our God reigns' through the saving power of Jesus, our Good Shepherd and protector.

We pray, in faith and with assurance, the words of Psalm 121:

**The Lord will keep you from all harm,  
He will watch over your life.  
The Lord will watch over your coming in and your going out,  
Now and evermore.  
Amen.**

### **Affirmation of Faith**

Praise God who loves us  
**Praise God who cares.**

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith, and fill us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

## **Prayers**

Celtic Christians, mindful of the great dangers that lurked around them as they went about their mission, prayed their 'circle' prayers, asking God to encircle and protect them.

We begin our prayers today with some prayers for ourselves:

**Circle me, Lord  
keep peace within, keep harm  
without,  
Circle me, Lord.  
keep love within, keep hate  
without.**

Lord, help me to unclutter my life,  
To organize myself in the direction of simplicity,  
Lord, teach me to listen to my heart;

Teach me to welcome change, instead of fearing it.  
Lord I give you these stirrings inside me,  
I give you my discontent,  
I give you my restlessness,  
I give you my doubt,  
I give you my despair,  
I give you all the longings I hold inside,  
Help me to listen to these signs of change, of growth,  
to listen seriously and follow where they lead,  
through the breathtaking empty space of an open door.  
Amen.

Lord, we pray, this day, that your voice will be heard calling your sheep, who you know by name, into your fold. That you will guide our nation out of lockdown, refresh us in our weariness. and lead us to pastures new.

**Come, Lord Jesus.**

We pray for those bowed down by grief and regret. We take a moment to pray for anyone in this situation known personally to us. Come Lord Jesus with your redeeming power.

**Come, Lord Jesus**

Lord, give us a vision for a better future. Help us to learn from our mistakes. Come into a world that longs for change, a world that needs your love, a world full of your own, a world ripe with hope and potential.

**Come, Lord Jesus.**

Lord, you have opened up the gates for us to enter your kingdom. Blessed are those who come in your name, O God. We have come. We will go.

And now we pray – we pray for your coming kingdom emerging all around us if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. We draw our prayers together with the words our Saviour has taught us:

**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.**

Song:  
*to be sung twice*

I will enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart.  
I will enter his gates with praise;  
I will say 'This is the day that the Lord has made,  
I will rejoice for he has made me glad.  
He has made me glad,  
He has made me glad;  
I will rejoice for he has made me glad.  
He has made me glad.  
He has made me glad,  
He has made me glad;  
I will rejoice for he has made me glad.

*Words & Music: Leona van Brethorst © 1976 Maranatha Music*

## **Blessing**

Christ the Good Shepherd  
Who laid down his life for the sheep,  
Draw us, and all who hear his voice,  
To be his flock within one fold.

May the peace of God  
And of Christ  
And of the Holy Spirit  
Be upon us and our children  
For ever more.  
Amen.

**Christ the Gateway and the Door  
Give us life for evermore.**

*David Adam: Open the Gate*

*For further study on this theme:*

*John: For Everyone Bible Study Guides, Tom Wright. Pub SPCK*