

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April –  
The Fourth Sunday of Easter**  
Led by Sue Nelms, LLM



**Opening Words**

We meet in the presence of God  
**who knows our needs,  
hears our cries,  
feels our pain,  
and heals our wounds.**



**Gathering Prayer**

O Lord, be our Shepherd,  
so we may receive all good things from your kindness.  
Fill us with your overflowing cup,  
and bring us to dwell in your house forever;  
through Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

**Hymn – The Lord’s My Shepherd, I’ll Not Want**

1 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.

2 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 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.

3 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.  
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.

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Music*

### **Meditation on a Poem by Malcolm Guite**

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 swung  
So easily for Pilate's practiced 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,  
The dreadful curtain, The forbidding veil  
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.

### **Confession**

When we cry out to the Lord in our trouble,  
**he will deliver us from our distress.**

God will bring us out of darkness  
**and out of the shadow of death.**

Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

Christ, have mercy.  
**Christ, have mercy.**

Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

May the Father forgive us  
by the death of his Son  
and strengthen us  
to live in the power of the Spirit  
all our days.  
**Amen.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord for his goodness,  
**and the wonders he does for his children.**

Let us offer him sacrifices of thanksgiving  
**and tell of his acts with shouts of joy.**

*cf Psalm 107*

## **Readings by Ann Griffiths**

### **Acts 4.5-12**

<sup>5</sup> The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem,  
<sup>6</sup> with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all  
who were of the high-priestly family. <sup>7</sup> When they had made the  
prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by  
what name did you do this?' <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit,  
said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are questioned  
today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are  
asked how this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you,  
and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in

good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.”

<sup>12</sup> There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.’

### **John 10.11-18**

<sup>11</sup> ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> 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.’

### **Reflection by Rev Priscilla Slusar**

Being part of a community is important for all of us, and especially if you live in a rural area. To feel that you are a member of a wider group, with shared interests and ideas, that you belong; you’re meeting up with people you know and can talk to, you have a role in that community, a part to play, you’re part of the team. Perhaps we have felt this even more strongly over this last year. The isolation of lockdown has made us more aware of what we are missing – not being able to meet up with friends and family, not being able to continue with hobbies or social groups. However, we have also become more aware of the impact on other members of the community; those who are lonely, bereaved or shielding because of ill health. Our sense of

community has been heightened because of these unusual circumstances.

In the gospel today Jesus is also talking about a community – the community of his followers, the sheep. We are the sheep (not always a flattering metaphor because sheep are often rather silly!) and Jesus is the shepherd. This is an image which occurs frequently in the Bible; Jesus is building on the representation of God as a shepherd in the Old Testament. We are all familiar with the well-loved Psalm 23 “The Lord is my shepherd”. Jesus is using the same idea of sheep and a good shepherd to illustrate his commitment to and love for his followers. The sheep need guidance and care and he will provide it.

I was watching Countryfile on television last week and saw a young teenage girl on a farm, looking after a flock of sheep. She had lived on the farm for 10 years and, from an early age, had learnt how to help with lambing and how to care for the sheep. There was a lovely scene showing her collecting together the orphan lambs and bottle feeding them. As soon as she appeared they knew that she was going to look after them and they just followed her into the farmhouse to receive their bottle of milk. It was an image of love and trust – from shepherd to sheep and from sheep to shepherd. This is the same image that Jesus is using.

Jesus has such loyalty to his flock that he will even face danger for them. When sheep face attack from wolves their natural instinct is to run away, to scatter, but this makes it easier for the wolf to pick off individuals. Jesus describes the way in which he, as the good shepherd, will fight for the sheep, trying to keep the flock together and safe. Even if one of the sheep breaks away, the shepherd will call that sheep by name and bring it back into the fold. This is not a cosy image; the shepherd is working hard on behalf of the sheep. It's an indication of the strength of that love and the commitment that is needed when faced with such challenges.

The hired hand doesn't have the same commitment to the sheep. He will run away when there is danger because he hasn't got the same depth of love for the sheep – the relationship is wrong, the feeling of teamwork in the community is missing because the leader hasn't got that commitment.

The image of the shepherd is an image based on a strong and deep relationship with the sheep. This depth of love means that he will even die in order to save them. Jesus is, of course, predicting his own death – he is emphasising that he will die for our salvation.

In today's gospel reading Jesus goes on to talk about the growth of the community. He talks about enlarging the flock. The original sheep that Jesus addressed were the people of Israel, but he then talks about the other sheep who will be brought into the fold – these could be the Gentiles or the outcasts of society. God's love and salvation brought about by Jesus' death is for all people not just for the chosen few.

This message is just as significant today as it was in Jesus' time. It's an open invitation for everyone to be part of that community – to belong to God, to have a special identity as God's people, to be loved and saved by him.

As followers of Jesus we are represented in this gospel reading as sheep. But we are also challenged throughout the Bible to follow the example of Jesus – to model ourselves on him. Therefore, we also have a responsibility to act as a shepherd to others; to show love, care and commitment and to draw people into the fold. One of the other readings set for today is from the first epistle of John. In this epistle John says "Let us love not in word or speech but in truth and action". It is a call to be proactive in our love for others and to draw people to God through our deeds as well as our words.

There was a clear example of this on television last week. A Panorama programme highlighted the disturbing issue of racism in the Church of England. Many reports have been written about this in the past but the programme now called for clear action to address the problem, to ensure that the Church is truly inclusive. The Archbishop of York, who was interviewed on the programme, stated that this is exactly what the Church intends to do.

We each have a role to play in developing a community based on love and belonging. The good shepherd embodies God's love for all, and we are called to live together as one flock and strive to be good shepherds ourselves.

Amen

## **Affirmation of faith**

Let us declare our faith  
in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Christ died for our sins  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he was buried;  
he was raised to life on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
afterwards he appeared to his followers,  
and to all the apostles:  
this we have received,  
and this we believe. Amen.**

*cf 1 Corinthians 15.3-7*

## **Prayers of Intercession led by Fiona Whelan**

Dear Lord we pray together this morning for all those in authority and for those who carry burdens of responsibility. We pray for your strength, guidance and wisdom for all who struggle to carry out the duties expected of them.

We pray in particular for the Queen and our Royal Family as they adjust to their new future after the loss of Prince Phillip and start to shape their new lives. We ask for Your strength for the Queen. And we pray for all those who serve and protect us - those who risk or sacrifice their lives for the protection and benefit of others. And where there has been any breakdown in trust in those relationships we ask you Lord for your healing and mercy.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Dear Lord we give you thanks and praise for the wonderful community of faith in which we all worship. We give thanks for all the members of our Lordsbridge team who contribute in so many different ways to help us to continue worshipping you and deepening our faith in these unprecedented times. For our ministers, lay ministers, house groups, friendships and all those seen and unseen.

At times some of us may have found our faith tested. We ask for your help in supporting us during those moments when we feel lost, confused or alone. When we struggle to pray or to find meaning in the words of the bible. Lord let us remember the words of this simple poem and never forget your eternal love and compassion for us:

I am with you when things are going good,  
when the way is bright and clear,  
I am with you my child when life looks bleak,  
and your vision is blurred with tears.  
I am with you when Happiness fills your heart,  
when the sun is shining bright,  
I am by your side when you feel alone,  
and you're surrounded by darkest night.  
I am with you when you have many friends,  
when others for you care,  
I am always with you when you're alone,  
your loneliness to share.  
I am with you when you're radiant with health,  
when you don't lack a thing,  
I am next to you when you're in pain,  
I am there to comfort bring.  
My child, I will always be there for you,  
remember that I care,  
Remember that you're not alone,  
I am there to your sorrows share!  
I will always be with you til the end of the world,  
I'll be there each step of the way,  
I am with you every moment, each hour,  
and each and every day.  
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Dear Lord as things change and start to slowly go back to some sense of normality for some of us, we pray for all those who are still vulnerable or anxious. For those shielding, for those suffering long term health effects, for those who have lost family members and perhaps



been unable to mark their passing as they would like, for those who have no normal to go back to.

For each and everyone we ask for your strength to face the future together and individually.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Father we ask for your mercy and your peace for all those affected by the recent trials and police actions in the USA. In particular we ask you to grant your peace to, and to effect reconciliation for the families of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin and all those affected by the events surrounding George's death and Derek's subsequent trial. We pray for those communities as they begin the painful process of healing and rebuilding trust. May necessary changes start to emerge. May we at all times reflect your mercy and love for us in our dealings with others.

Poignantly as this trial draws to a close we also pray for the families and friends of Jack Merritt and Saskia Jones as they face the difficulties of their current inquest. Wonderfully described as a force for good in the world, someone who made other people's lives better for knowing them. May the love and work of both these young people who so passionately wanted to bring about rehabilitation of offenders be carried on by all of us.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Lord we pray for your loving healing for all who have fears at the moment and for those who are sick or bereaved. In silence we bring before you those for whom we now pray

*Silence is kept*

As we face the highs and lows of the week to come, may we know and draw comfort from your love and mercy and reflect it in our deeds and interactions with others. We do not know what crosses others carry but may we be reflections of your love and compassion to all.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

## **Collect for the fourth Sunday of Easter**

Risen Christ,  
faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep:  
teach us to hear your voice  
and to follow your command,  
that all your people may be gathered into one flock,  
to the glory of God the Father. **Amen**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**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 forever. Amen.**

## **Blessing**

The God of peace,  
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,  
that great shepherd of the sheep,  
make us perfect in every good work to do his will;  
and the blessing of God almighty  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ.**