

HOW MC & KSAT Worship Service for 25 April 2021

With thanks to Sue Thackray.

Welcome to worship.

This Sunday is known as Good Shepherd Sunday because it includes both the Psalm 23 and John 10 readings. I had never heard of Good Shepherd Sunday before but I have now!

Throughout the Bible, there are many analogies of sheep and their shepherds. Moses was a shepherd for the Israelites, leading them through the wilderness for 40 years. David was a shepherd before he became King of Israel. Jesus described himself as “the Good Shepherd”, one who “lays down his life for his sheep”. We hear about sheep and shepherds in the Parable of the Lost Sheep where the shepherd went after the one sheep who had strayed from the fold and did not stop looking until he found it. We will be reading about God as our shepherd in Psalm 23. And throughout the book of Psalms there are constant reminders of this:

“But he brought his people out like a flock, he led them like sheep through the wilderness.” Psalm 78 :52.

“Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” Psalm 100 :3.

Jesus asked Peter if he loved him and told him. “Feed my lambs” and “Take care of my sheep.”

But despite the idyllic scenes of rolling green pasture, lazy, grazing sheep and long, carefree afternoons on the hillside, the work of a shepherd is not easy. (As I am sure many of you know first-hand). In reality, shepherds are tough-bodied and equally tough minded people working a clear plan, co-ordinating the overall movement of a group of easily distracted herd animals, and ready to intervene at a moment’s notice to bring individuals going astray or into danger back into safety. Far from worry-free, the life and work of a shepherd is one of nearly constant vigilance. This is the kind of shepherd Jesus was and is. A Good Shepherd, guiding us, protecting us, gently leading us, and ultimately, laying down his life for us. Through what we will be reading from the Bible during this service, may you feel God’s love and care, his tenderness and that a sense of safety will be very real to you.

Let us come to our Lord in prayer:

Safe in the knowledge that we are loved, we come to the Good Shepherd seeking succour for our souls.

Let not the wolf snatch our thoughts and scatter them for our minds belong to Jesus, and our hearts are open to Him.

Lord, we adore you, our Good Shepherd, always there, always watchful.

Your fold is the space you hold for us, where we know we are loved.

Although dangers surround us, and in the foolishness we may stray, you have our back.

So many sheep, yet you know us all by name.

Lord, we adore you, our Good Shepherd. Amen

Let's say the Lord's Prayer together.....Amen

HYMN "The King of love my Shepherd is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWfZ-8s71-k>

The King of love my shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never.

I nothing lack if I am His, and He is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow, my ransomed soul He leadeth.

And where the verdant pastures grow, with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, but yet in love He sought me.

And on His shoulders gently laid, and home rejoicing brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill, with Thee, dear Lord, beside me.

Thy rod and staff my comfort still, Thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight, Thy unction grace bestoweth.

And O what transport of delight from Thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days, Thy goodness faileth never.

Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise, within Thy house for ever!

We are going to look at Psalm 23. Most people probably know this Psalm word for word, that is why we are going to look at it a little differently now. Looking at each verse separately with the knowledge that we all are the sheep of his pasture and this is a comforting and restful thought. As we are reading this enjoy dwelling in His presence.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

The beautiful part about this verse is that David, the author of this psalm, begins by reminding us of who God is. Jesus refers to Himself in John 10 1-18 as the gate. We like sheep, are to walk through the gate to see our Good Shepherd. He is good because he lays down his life for the sheep, and not only that, but he picks it back up so that we may know the Father and love him. Now that we have the Father, we have everything we need, and shall not want.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."

As God's sheep, we can rest knowing he is protecting us and leading us into green pastures. Pastures filled with growth instead of death and peaceful waters instead of dangerous ones.

“He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

The Good Shepherd is leading us on the right path for our life. The path is pure and holy because of Jesus' blood. God knew it wouldn't be a straight line to get to where we are and it can be filled with difficulties.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

The valley of the shadow of death is a real place for some of us, full of depression and hardships. Even Jesus felt depression in the garden of Gethsemane. As Christians our lives are far from perfect and we sometimes don't understand when things happen. But we still have our Good Shepherd guiding us. Now, because Jesus defeated evil for us, we don't have to fear. He is with us comforting us to the end of the age.

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

God is inviting us to sit in his presence, not focus on the enemy that is all around us, because as close as the enemy is, our Jesus is even closer. Since we are his sons and daughters, we overflow with his love and our cup runneth over.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Our Good Shepherd is not only with us in this life, but also in the one to come. He has invited us into his house, where we can dwell forever, made possible by the sacrifice of his only son Jesus.

God's word not only informs us but also transforms us, giving us hope and the comfort that we are not alone.

New Testament reading John 10 11-18 (new Living Translation)

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he is working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep. I am the

good shepherd, I know my own sheep and they know me. Just as my Father knows me, I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock with one shepherd. The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life, so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.”

HYMN “All the way my Saviour leads me.”

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

**All the way my Saviour leads me, what have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my guide?
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell.
For I know whate’er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.**

**All the way my Saviour leads me, cheers each winding path I tread.
Gives me grace for every trial, feeds me with the living bread.
Though my weary steps may falter, and my soul a-thirst may be.
Gushing from the rock before me, Lo! A spring of joy I see.**

**All the way my Saviour leads me, O the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised, in my Father’s house above.
When my spirit, clothed, immortal, wings its flight to realms of day.
This, my song through endless ages, Jesus led me all the way.**

REFLECTION on John 10 11-18

Good Shepherd

In this passage Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, the religious leaders. So when Jesus says I am the Good Shepherd, who is he contrasting himself with? – the hired hand.

Jesus is everything the hired hand is not. He is willing and did lay his life down for his sheep (us). In John 15 v13 it says “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” They are his sheep, they belong to him and they have an intimate relationship with him. Jesus said, “I know my own and my own know me.”

In giving of his life Jesus does something for the community that no one else has ever done. All the past leaders avoided suffering for the community. They came the ‘wrong way’, not through the gate. In John 10 7 Jesus says “I tell you

the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.”, and the leaders came to take advantage of the people. Instead of giving them life they took it away from them. But Jesus came to give them life through the giving of his own. He did this not as a victim but as a willing voluntary sacrifice. “No one takes it from me.” He said “but I lay it down of my own accord.” John 10 17-18.

Hired hand

A hired hand does not own the sheep, a wolf could come and the hired hand flees and leaves the sheep to their fate. The hired hand cares only about getting paid and is not willing to risk his life for someone else’s sheep.

Who was Jesus depicting when he talked about hired hands in this passage? They represented the leaders of Israel, who claimed to care for their country and its people but were really only interested in protecting themselves, their positions and their power.

Nothing much changes, does it? Throughout history up to the present day we could reel off people in power who have abused their position to the detriment of the ordinary people.

The wolf

The wolf in the passage could represent other people or other ideas which attempt to lead us astray or lie to us about what is most important and it is very difficult not to be tempted by these things. We all fall short. Jesus is the only one we should totally trust and listen to. We can take heart in the truth of what Jesus promised because he has already accomplished our salvation through his death and resurrection.

For a minute think of the people in your lives that have had a positive effect, have cared for you, loving, helping, encouraging, protecting People who are willing to put themselves out for others, not for any benefit of their own are being as Jesus wants them to be. He is the ultimate Good Shepherd, an example to us all. Modelling God’s all embracing care for his people. Faith and love cannot be contained by thoughts and words but by behaviour and actions. How different our world would be if people decided to think more of others and not what they want or think they themselves deserve to have.

When Jesus said that there are other sheep outside this fold. (He was alluding to the Gentiles). He will bring them in. They will hear his voice and there will be one flock and one shepherd. This is a wonderful statement because it means

you and me. No one who believes in Him will be left alone. We are all his people not just for now but for ever! Amen

A prayer of thanksgiving

Lord, a year ago your house was not a fold in which we could meet. Confined to our homes, we prayed as a silent wolf prowled the world, a pandemic that threatened us all. We thank you for watching over us, and for those of us who were safely delivered. It was a testing time, Lord, but yet there was community. We thank you for the proof that your Church has no walls as we learned to reach out to one another and still to worship – but in different ways. We thank you for those in our communities who had been taken for granted, overlooked, not considered of great importance, but on whom we came to rely to save lives. We thank you that our values were tested and that we saw what really matters. Good Shepherd, who knows suffering and sacrifice beyond our imagining. We thank you that we are here today, enfolded in your love.

Amen

HYMN “May God’s Blessing”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egAXy5kQKFc>

May God’s blessing surround you each day

As you trust Him and walk in His way

May His presence within, guard and keep you from sin

Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

Lord, send us out to be faithful sheep and help us to follow the Good Shepherd. Amen