

Rural Branch News - Spring 2017

Normally lambing time on the farm means that passers-by would often see a figure layered up against the cold wind in an oversized donkey jacket and a hat Paddington bear would be proud of, walking the fields carrying what may appear to be, from a distance, a couple of rag-dolls, one under each arm, followed by a bleating ewe- and it would be ME!! I would be doing my usual rounds of checking the sheep and bringing any newborns in to the buildings, out of the cold winds – maybe to put the lambs under a heat lamp for a while to get them going, or sometimes it can be to top them up with a bottle feed or by tube if they are particularly weak. But this year has been very different –no hat, no donkey jacket required – and it has been a delight to amble across the fields most days without even a coat as it has been so warm and dry. I think most of the lambs had not experienced rain until today when we had the first, much needed, shower. We have been greatly blessed with spring sunshine, and now everything is in full bloom, the wild cherries with their delicate pale blossoms, and the woods adorned with bluebells are all proclaiming Spring! Spring! Spring!

We have even made a start on the shearing, in line with the old saying 'you may shear your sheep when the apple blossoms peep.' We are a few weeks into lambing, and one of the joys is to see them playing 'chase' along the boundaries of the field, and jumping 'tiger' style into the air, easily reaching heights above their own.

We have a mound at one end of the field, next to the house which we overlook from the farmhouse kitchen and often you can see the lambs playing there (I'm sure they are playing 'I'm the king of the castle'). Despite the lovely weather I have still had to bring in the odd troubled lamb that, after a good feed, has snuggled up overnight in a straw-filled box next to the range in the kitchen, allowing it to gently warm through. In the morning, I have come down the stairs to the loud bleating of a hungry lamb, nicely warmed and eager to get back to its mum. Sometimes we have lambs that struggle to feed on their mum at first, so we put them and their mum in a pen and regularly go to suckle them throughout the day - it is so important that they get that first rich feed of colostrum. Colostrum is the "first milk" that a ewe produces after lambing. It contains a high level of antibodies and several nutrients that are important for a lambs health.

Often when I am walking around the sheep I have my quiet time with God and I find that he will often talk with me through the things that are around me. The Sunday after Easter at our Church in Fairford, we had the passage from John's gospel about Jesus telling Peter to feed his sheep, and as I walked I had this passage on my mind.

This coming autumn we are hosting an outreach event at Fairford, (as Churches working together) and one of the things we have been thinking about is the importance of nurturing and follow up. We need to feed our Christian lambs, those that are newborn in their faith - it is so important for them to receive that 'first milk', that first rich feed that will give them a good start in their Christian life. But it doesn't end there, the task goes on – it is a long term calling for we also need to feed our sheep. We hope to set up nurturing groups for those needing both first milk and more sustaining food, in the hope that we can raise up interest in learning more about Jesus Christ through his word. For it is in the getting to know the shepherd that our joy is found.

For we have the best of shepherds- his diligence never tires, his care is ongoing and his provision eternal. When we are aware of our Shepherd Jesus– there is no lack, there is just abundant green pasture, still waters, there is freedom from fear and new paths to explore.

As His church may we aspire to be like Him – the Good Shepherd and feed His lambs – take care of His sheep and feed His sheep in His name.

Rosie Emmerson, Rural Affairs Officer