

25 April 2021

The Good Shepherd

Welcome

Whoever you are, wherever you are, whenever you are; whether you belong to one of the churches in the Gloucestershire Circuit sponsoring this service, or whether you've never set foot in a church in your life; whether you are here in Gloucestershire or in a remote land on the other side of the world; whether you are sharing with us on this Sunday 25 April 2021 or some time in the distant future, welcome! We are delighted that you are sharing in worship with us.

Let us begin with a well-known Eastertide hymn: At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow.

Hymn StF 317 – At the Name of Jesus

At the name of Jesus Every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure We should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning Was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, To receive a name
From the lips of sinners Unto whom he came,
Faithfully he bore it Spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious When from death he passed:

Bore it up triumphant With its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures To the central height,
To the throne of Godhead, To the Father's breast;
Filled it with the glory Of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him; There let him subdue
All that is not holy, All that is not true;
Crown him as your captain In temptation's hour:
Let his will enfold you In its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus Shall return again,
With his Father's glory, With his angel train;
All the wreaths of empire Meet upon his brow,
And our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

Prayers of Approach and Adoration

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Giver of Life, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; at the opening of this day you call us out of darkness into your marvellous light; Blessed are you for ever and ever. Amen.

I believe in God

I believe in the Father-Mother, Only Source and Only Maker – the Mother-Father who gives me and all of creation both purpose and freedom.

I believe in Jesus Christ, Only Son and Only Wisdom – the Jesus Christ who is the eternal Word, yet was born, died and risen for me and for all.

I believe in the Spirit, Only Life and Only Power – the Spirit who speaks in the heart and who gives life to all of creation

I believe in the One God.

Our Father

- The Prayer Jesus taught us; please use the version closest to your heart, whether it is printed here or not.

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name: thy kingdom come: thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever; AMEN.

Ein Tad, yr hwn wyt yn y nefoedd, Sancteiddier dy Enw. Deued dy deyrnas. Bydded dy ewyllys ar y ddaear, Megis y mae yn y nefoedd. Dyro i ni heddyw ein bara beunyddiol. A maddeu i ni ein dyledioin, Fel y maddeuwn ni i 'n dyledwyr. Ac nac arwain ni i brofedigaeth; Eithr gwared ni rhag drwg:

Canys eiddot ti yw'r deyrnas, A'r gallu, A'r gogoniant, Yn oes oesoedd. Amen.

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, Save us in the time of trial And deliver us from evil,

For the kingdom, the power And the glory are yours, Now and for ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading: John 10:11-18

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

‘I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep 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 are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.’

Talk – What is a good shepherd?

This is a very familiar passage, so don't expect anything but clichés from me today!

But clichés are clichés for a reason; they are exactly the key points, the points that need saying over and over again.

And this is such a case; the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is the key to so much of who Jesus is, of what Jesus tries to do in our lives, in the lives of those who know him.

He gives us safety; within that he gives us freedom – he leads us to good pasture, but we can roam where we like. He keeps an eye on us – not a controlling eye, but a friendly eye, ready to help when we get into difficulties, often simply ready to be there for us. And more and more things, too many to list here.

Of course, we are his sheep, and we see him from the point of view of his sheep; these are the things that matter to sheep. But what if we look instead from outside? What would a good shepherd look like to someone from outside the flock?

Well, there is a standard measure that all shepherds use to compare with each other. It's called the Lambing Ratio – it compares how many sheep you have before lambing, and how many after. Simple. It works, because the more skilfully a ewe is shepherded, the more likely she is to have twins, or even triplets or quadruplets, and the more likely she is to rear them all.

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Of course, it depends on other things as well; it depends on the breed of sheep; it depends on the weather, it depends on the type of pasture. But other things being equal, an outsider will judge a shepherd on his Lambing Ratio – on the productivity of his flock.

Have you thought that outsiders judge Jesus the same way? Oh, we don't give birth to lambs, but we do produce: we produce justice, we produce mercy, we produce love: love for all those around us, mercy, food, money for those who deserve it and those who don't deserve it, justice for the downtrodden and forgotten – we produce hope for all those around us, and we create hope within them.

And that is how the outsiders judge Jesus – the good shepherd – on the justice, commitment, selfcontrol, insight that we his sheep show to all those around us – on the faith, the hope, the love that Jesus the Good Shepherd can bring out of us, and not just at lambing, but at every season of the year.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray.

God, most gracious and most holy, grant us the help of your Spirit as we pray for the Church and the world.

We pray for the Church in every land...

for this church and for other local churches ...

that we may worship and serve you with reverence and joy.

Silence

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

We pray for the peoples of the world...

and for the leaders of the nations...

that all may work together for justice and peace.

Silence

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

We pray for those who are ill or distressed...

for the lonely and the bereaved...

and for those in any other need or trouble...

that they may be comforted and sustained.

Silence

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Father, we remember before you all your servants who have died in the faith of Christ, We pray that we too may lead faithful and godly lives in this world, and finally share with all the saints in everlasting joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Our next hymn is Jesus speaking to his flock; it's from the Iona Community, and is used with their permission: Will you come and follow me?

Hymn StF 673 – Will you come and follow Me

Will you come and follow Me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let My love be shown, will you let My name be known,
Will you let My life be grown in you, and you in Me?

Will you leave yourself behind If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare, Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let Me answer prayer In you and you in Me?

Will you let the blinded see If I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free And never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean, And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean In you and You in Me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found To reshape the world around,
Through My sight and touch and sound In you and You in Me?

Lord, Your summons echoes true When You but call my name.
Let me turn and follow You And never be the same.
In Your company I'll go Where Your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow In You and You in me.

Reading; 1John 3:16-24

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: if our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us.

Talk – We Are His Sheep

And here's John saying it again in his first letter – we can know what Jesus has done for us – we can know what Jesus does for us, but outsiders obviously can't see that. We know Jesus has died for us; we know that Jesus sets our hearts at rest; we know that we have confidence in God because Jesus is with us; we know that we have everything we need because Jesus loves us. But other people?

All they can know is what they see. They see Jesus at work in our lives because they see us at work in other people's lives; bringing them justice and mercy; they see Jesus giving us everything we need because they see us giving other people everything they need; they see Jesus setting our hearts at rest because they see us setting other people's hearts at rest – and not just our friends, but all our brothers and sisters – all those who share in the Fatherhood of God – all those around us, without judgement, without prejudice, without all those isms that plague our world. They see us loving our neighbour as ourselves, and so they see us love God.

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And curiously, it works for us too. The more we listen to the Spirit in our hearts, the more we will reach out to other people; the more we reach out to other people, the more we will see of Jesus in our lives; the more we live in him, the more we will understand just what he has done for us – and for all our brothers and sisters; the more we will know that God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life.

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 for ever.

Confession & Absolution

Eternal God, undivided Three in One,
Eternal Father, Creator, Redeemer and Life
Eternal Son, Creator, Redeemer and Life
Eternal Spirit, Creator, Redeemer and Life

We have so often mistrusted the work of your hands in science and technology
We have so often ignored the wounds of the Cross in the poor and the despised
We have so often smothered the joy of your new life in rules and selfpride and petty prejudices
We have no excuse; all we can do is acknowledge our faults and ask you to forgive us.

(Silence)

Hear now the words of Jesus for all who are truly sorry and look for a new way to live:
Your sins are forgiven; go in peace; come and follow me.

(Silence)

Help us now, O God, to accept your forgiveness, and to live in the joy, the purity and the wholeness of
your unconditional grace in reunion with you,
until we come where every mouth in heaven and earth cries Glory to the Lamb!
through Christ our Lord.

Amen

(Based on a prayer by the Wild Goose Resource Group, Iona Community, Glasgow, Scotland)

Commitment

(At this point the pre-recorded service includes a video prepared by Revd Phil Summers on Vocation: the link is <https://youtu.be/9aVxDCyHeXg>. Those who are using this printed service may wish to say the following act of commitment instead)

I bind unto myself the name, The strong name of the Trinity,
By invocation of the same, The Three in One, and One in Three,
Of whom all nature hath creation, Eternal Father, Spirit, Word.
Praise to the Lord of my salvation: Salvation is of Christ the Lord.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
Amen

And our closing hymn – sung by a Methodist choir in lockdown! In Christ Alone

Hymn StF 351 – In Christ alone

In Christ alone my hope is found, he is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid ground firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All, here in the love of Christ I stand.

There in the ground his body lay, light of the world by darkness slain:
then bursting forth in glorious Day up from the grave he rose again!
And as he stands in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am his and he is mine — bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand;
till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Thank you again for joining with us in this opportunity to worship – shall we join together in blessing one another, however remote in time or space, with the words of the Grace:

The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore AMEN