



Worship at Home – Fourth Sunday of Easter – 25th April

Father God help us to come to you this morning with open and thankful hearts. Fill us with the joy and peace that comes with knowing you. Be with us as we walk in your light, rejoice in your love and reflect your glory.

Amen

Hymn 97: Christ is made the sure foundation

Welcome

The Lord be with you,
and also with you

Prayer of Preparation

**Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord.
Amen**

Prayer of Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself". There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in life eternal through Jesus Christ our lord. **Amen**

Collect

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that we may seek those things which are above, where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

New Testament Reading: Acts 4: 5 - 12

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, 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, 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. This Jesus is "the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone." There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

Hymn 649: The king of love

Gospel Reading: John 10:11-18

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

Glory to you, O Lord

'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 Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

Sermon: Becca Herrick

"I am the good shepherd", says Jesus. The words that conjure up the image of fluffy sheep frolicking in lush, green fields on a beautiful sunny spring day under the watchful eye of a loving

shepherd. Bliss! But a shepherd isn't just the person to look after the sheep, they are the one to lead and guide them too – to safety, to what they need. In scripture shepherds are used as an image of the ideal leader, a picture of the ultimate shepherd-king who would one day rule over God's people fairly and justly, guiding and leading them. Like King David, Israel's most famous king, but perfect. God says through the prophet Ezekiel: "I will place over the people one shepherd... and he will tend them and be their shepherd". It is no wonder then, that by the end of Jesus' speech about shepherds the Jews are conflicted, some claiming Jesus to be demon-possessed and raving mad!

In the verses preceding Jesus' speech, John tells us of a man born blind, healed by Jesus. When the healed man is dragged before the Pharisees to be questioned, he tells the Pharisees that Jesus is from God. The man born blind sees. Ironically the Pharisees still do not. So Jesus tells them "I am the good shepherd". Jesus is claiming to be from God, in word and deed. No wonder he's causing controversy amongst the Jews!

What does Jesus mean when he says he's the good shepherd? I'm sure a shepherd wouldn't be the first model we'd go to when trying to describe the role of a good leader today. What image might we use? A doctor, perhaps? A teacher, maybe? The Israelites would have understood Jesus' image of the shepherd to describe the leader he is – one who willingly lays down his life; one who knows and is known by those he leads.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. In the last year alone, we have seen many examples of sacrifice for the benefit of others, but even today it can be counter-cultural to expect a leader to care for the individuals that they lead, let alone lay down their lives. Yet Jesus is different. He chooses, of his own free will, to lay down his life for his people. He didn't do it because he was made to, because he was paid to, because it would get him a promotion or more likes on social media. He actively gave up life that we might have life. As he says "no-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord". Why? Because unlike the hired hand who runs away and cares nothing for the sheep, to this shepherd, the sheep matter. They are in danger and they need to be rescued. Jesus says "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand". The sheep are worth dying for.

The sheep are worth knowing. As I watched the coverage of the Duke of Edinburgh's funeral, I was struck by how we feel like we know the royal family. The reality is most of us don't really know them, we only know about them from what we hear in the media. The use of the word know by Jesus means more than just knowledge *about* a person, but a deep relational knowledge *of* a person, a deep relationship *with* a person. Knowing their hearts, their innermost thoughts, dreams and fears, in a way we often yearn for in our relationships with others. After a year of isolation and loneliness for many, don't you just long to be known? God proclaims: "I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness... I myself will tend my sheep and make them lie down... I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak." The promises of a good shepherd who knows his sheep and their needs. The promises of God realised in Jesus.

And Jesus' sheep know him. Just like that intimate relationship of God the Father and God the Son, the most perfect example of love. We know his voice, that tug on our hearts, that cry in our minds, when we draw near to Him. By laying down his life for us, Jesus draws us back into that

relationship of love with the Father, where we were always meant to be. That love that Jesus knows through his perfect obedience to the Father.

But who are Jesus' sheep? Here he indicates that it's not just Israel that he has been called to redeem. Jesus' call was to other sheep too, that all that know the shepherd would become one flock under him. United in Christ, the shepherd. Another perceived threat for the Jews, that the Messiah would not just be for them, but those outside of their religion too. A challenge for us, when we see our own walk with Christ as being somehow better than another's. We are all one flock, under one shepherd.

"I am the good shepherd", says Jesus. These words spoken before that first Easter, were a sign of what was to come, that Jesus would lay down his life, willingly, obediently, for all people. We forget the shock that that must have been, living as we do, this side of his resurrection. Jesus' lovers and haters were still to watch him die that cruel death on the cross. Jesus knew that, he warned them of that and still he volunteered his life willingly. But he also had the power and authority through God to take it up again, to come back to life. The hope of the first Easter. The Good Shepherd did not lay down his life forever. He is alive. The Shepherd-King who knows and loves us, and longs to welcome us into his flock today.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers

The Peace

Take a moment and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for each other and our church family church community. Maybe call or text someone who would enjoy sharing the peace with you.

May the God of peace make you perfect and holy, that you may be kept safe and blameless in spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Hymn 184: For the beauty of the earth

Lord's Prayer

**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.**

Remembering the Lord's Supper

Take a moment to remember the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. As we think about this meal - with the washing of feet and bread and wine shared with friends - we remember Jesus' offering of himself on the cross. We rejoice in his resurrection from the dead and look forward to the coming of God's Kingdom. While we cannot receive Christ in the sacraments in the usual way, we can be the presence of Christ in our homes and communities, and we can be a praying presence wherever we are.

Hymn 161: Father hear the prayer we offer

Closing Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for this time of worship; may your love and peace remain with us in the coming days. Be with us in all that we will think, say and do so that our lives may reflect your glory. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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