

Sheffield Team Ministry
Worship for Individual or a family on Sunday 3rd May 2020 at 10:30 am
4th Sunday of Easter - 'Finding Pasture'

Call to Worship

I/We come because we know we are welcome, O God.

I/We come because you call us by name, O God.

I/We come together to offer you our worship, O God.

I/We come in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Hymn The Lord's my Shepherd

Prayer

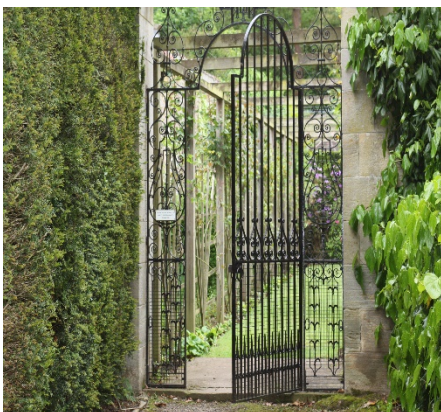
Our God, you are our shepherd. We thank you that you give us everything we need. That you offer us rest and refreshment through your Word. Thank you for sleep and for the new day. We thank you that you keep us on the straight and narrow when we are prone to stray. We thank you for all those times when we are afraid and anxious, we know that we can trust you.

Mighty God, in whom we know the power of redemption, you stand among us in the shadows of our time. As we move through every sorrow and trial of this life, uphold us with knowledge of your love

Living God, who moulds us and shapes us, we confess when we fail to serve your purposes. Remake us we pray.

Merciful God, you make us new and set us free, you use our cracks and breaks to your glory. We are resurrection people and cannot remain the same. Therefore, we accept your forgiveness and ask that you will fill us with courage to be all that you make us in these changed and challenging times. We say together the prayer which Jesus taught us...

Our Father...



Readings for the week

Psalm 23 – The Lord is my Shepherd

John 10:1 -10 – Jesus said 'I am the gate. Whosoever enters by me will saved and will come in and out and find pasture

Acts 2: 42-47 – The early church and how they worked together to meet everybody's need

1 Peter 2:19-25 – Jesus as the suffering servant of God

Reflection on Psalm 23 - "I have everything I ever need".

We've just heard the 23rd Psalm, a piece of Biblical text that's perhaps more familiar to many people than any other part of the Bible.

And because of that familiarity, it's very easy to just sit back and let the words wash over you, revelling in the comfortable feeling that you know this one, you don't have to put any thought into it, you've done all your thinking about this long ago.

But over the last couple of months, as my appearance on your computer screen today demonstrates, we've had to find new ways of doing things.

So I'd like you to come with me and find a new way of letting these words flow over you.

I had an email from Zaidie a week and a half ago, inviting me to lead this reflection, and so I'd been living with the readings for today – from Psalm 23, from Acts chapter 2, from the first letter of Peter, and from John chapter 10 – for a few days by the time last Sunday came round. I'd been looking at the final lines of Acts 2, and it tells us that ⁴⁴ *all the believers were together*, and ⁴⁶ *every day they continued to meet*.

They're hard words to read at the moment, while we're all being kept separate like this.

I'm sure many of you were looking at your computer screens as I was, this time last week, when Zaidie brought these words of prayer to us:

Please give us everything we need each day.

And then, a moment or two later:

Strengthen us when we are challenged and lead us through difficult days.

Golly, we need that strength, don't we! These days are so difficult, for so many people. We long for those times to return when we were free to assemble and share together in the way that the early church was doing at the end of Acts 2. But we have to find new ways of doing society, new ways of doing friendship, new ways of doing community.

So we pray. *"Please give us everything we need each day.*

Strengthen us when we are challenged and lead us through difficult days."

These were some of the things knocking around in my head when I turned to Psalm 23, wondering if there was anything new I could find in this very familiar text.

And I read:

¹ *The Lord is my trusted, loving carer, and I will always have everything I will ever need.*

And then, a moment or two later:

³⁻⁴ *Even when I'm walking through a valley of deepest darkness, fear will never defeat me. You remain close to me and lead me through it all the way. Your authority is my strength and my peace, and the comfort of your love takes away my fear.*

And it's clear to me that prayer is always answered. Give us everything we need each day, we pray; and the Psalmist says I will always have everything I will ever need. Strengthen us when we are challenged and lead us through difficult days, we pray; and the Psalmist says that even in a valley of deepest darkness, the Lord remains close and leads us all the way – all the way through it and out the other side.

What a strong, powerful image it is, for the Lord to be our shepherd! And while the world around us changes radically, becoming the dark valley that it is at the moment, the Lord

remains as a steadfast presence in our lives, restoring our souls, guiding our paths and comforting us from our fears.

Let's read on.

⁵ *You prepare a feast for me, confronting those who hate me with your care of me.*

You treat me as your most valued guest. I will always have everything I will ever need.

Wait, I've read something about this somewhere else.

Oh, right. Today's Gospel reading is drawn from the first ten verses of John chapter 10, where Jesus brings us another explanation of just how the Lord is our shepherd. Go seek it out later, in your own time, if you like. But I'm reminded particularly of the last few words of today's Gospel reading, where John records the words of Jesus telling us that the Lord is "*come to give us life in all its fullness, the best life it's possible for us to have*". And with those words, Jesus brings the message from today's psalm into vivid life. Where the psalmist writes "*You prepare a feast for me; I will always have everything I will ever need*", Jesus echoes "*I bring you the best life it's possible for you to have*". So life under the protection of the Lord really is life in all its fullness.

If we accept the loving guidance of the Good Shepherd, "⁶ *there really is no doubt that [His] goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*".

Praise the Lord.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, who calls the nations to your throne as a Shepherd calls sheep and goats...

We pray that the nations of the world will be led by your voice to enact justice and mercy like the sheep of the parable:

That the hungry of the world will be fed

That those thirsty for knowledge and wisdom will be educated

That those who are strangers, stateless and homeless will be welcomed in your House

That those who live in the nakedness of poverty will have an abundance

That those who are sick will receive the care they need

That those imprisoned by failure or addiction will find new life

And at this time of crisis, we pray in particular for great wisdom for the leaders of nations.

For strength to all who are working on the front line of health services and communities

For provision for those who are suffering in economically challenging situations

Jesus, Good Shepherd, seeking the lost...

We pray that you will guide your church at this time of challenge, and let us not lose sight of your abundant love and grace

Help us hear your call to walk with you, especially when we have been anxious and not listened to your voice. Lead us by still waters that we may turn from our busy pre-occupations to spend time listening to your voice

Holy Spirit, the voice of the Good Shepherd speaking to the sheep...

We pray that your flock will recognize your voice in these days according to your promise and that you would speak to all who are in need...

for the sick: a whisper of healing

for the dying: a trumpet-call of resurrection hope

for those who mourn: a word of comfort

for those who feel isolated: a telephone-call of friendship

for those who are working so hard: an invitation to rest

for those who are struggling with fear: an encouragement to trust

for those tempted to act selfishly: a warning of restraint

and for us all: a voice of love.

We remember now those in our congregations who walk alongside in their pain and suffering, their joy and hope. We think of them now in a time of silence...

Lord God, shepherd all your people on their different journeys, with their different joys and struggles. Remind us that we are honoured guests at your table and that all may find a home in you. Show us your goodness and love so that we might know that in you we have everything we need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Hymn Father I place into your hands

Father, I place into your hands, the things that I can't do.

Father I place into your hands the times that I've been through.

Father I place into your hands the way that I should go

For I know, I always can trust you.

Blessings

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the Good Shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection,
and give us grace to follow in his steps;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**