

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry an act of devotion for individual or families
Sunday 25th April 2021 at 10:30 am

Opening words

Come and worship our Shepherd God - Come as you are
Come and follow the One who calls us each by name
Who loves, protects and cares for us.
We lift our voices to praise you. Amen.

Opening Hymn R&S 74

Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the king of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!
Come, all who hear; brothers and sisters draw near, praise him in glad adoration!

Praise to the Lord, above all things so mightily reigning;
keeping us safe at his side and so gently sustaining.
Have you not seen all you have needed has been met by his gracious ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who shall prosper our work and defend us;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend us.
Ponder anew what the almighty can do, who with his love will befriend us.

Praise to the Lord - O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the "Amen!" sound from his people again; gladly with praise we adore him!

Prayer of Worship (written by Anne Dale)

Ever-living God, we praise you for the mercy, love and hope
That your sign of the rainbow sets before us.
We praise you for bending down to dwell with humankind in Christ,
bringing us the promise of salvation.

Rainbow God

You come as the rose red dawn bringing us a new beginning;
You come as the golden sun at noon filling our lives with warmth and joy;
You come as the yellow corn of wholesome bread sustaining us through troubled times;
You come as the green leaves of spring, a constant sign of renewal;
You come as the blue waters of a cool stream refreshing our tired spirits;
You come as the deep velvet evening sky bringing calm and peace into our anxiety.

Rainbow God, sometimes we glimpse your glory, and then it fades before our limited vision;
Open our eyes we pray so that we may see your brilliance, that pure light which illuminates totally all
who find you, and may our lives then shine for you - Amen

Readings



John 10:11-18 - Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows and cares for his sheep...

Psalm 23 – The Lord, the Good Shepherd leads David from the fields to the Royal House.

I John 3:16-24 - How do we know what love looks like?

Acts 4: 5-12 - The Apostles proclaim Jesus with boldness

Song preparing for Reflection R&S678

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again, and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness, e'en for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale, yet will I fear none ill,
for thou art with me and thy rod and staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnished in presence of my foes.
My head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me,
and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be

Reflection

Today many churches are marking Good Shepherd Sunday. Good Shepherd Sunday and the Gospel reading we heard from Saint John this morning invites us to recognise and remember that Jesus is 'the good shepherd.'

The Shepherd is a very ancient image in Jewish culture. Perhaps most famously, in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, there's David the shepherd-boy. David who you may remember defeating the giant Goliath to become David the shepherd-king and who united the 12 Jewish tribes and turned them into a nation centred around YHWH - the God of Abraham and Jacob. These actions made David a kind of ideal standard for Jewish leaders and meant that the Shepherd became the dominant image for Jewish leadership.

The prophets talked about shepherds in various ways in order to comfort and challenge God's people. Most strikingly there is the prophet Ezekiel, who railed against the bad shepherds, who cared nothing for the sheep, but who devoured them. Those "shepherds" referred to the religious leaders, who only cared about their positions, who did not care about the people. The prophets promised that a shepherd leader like David would arise to lead Israel into the kingdom of God.

And as we heard from the bible as well as listened to, in the well-known Psalm 23, which begins: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." A psalm attributed to David - YHWH is the shepherd who cares for the sheep, even through the valley of the shadow of death. This Psalm has helped many, many of us through times of loss and difficulty, often used at funerals as well as through times of rejoicing. A psalm that emphasises God is with each and every one of us: shepherding and supporting us all through the ups and the downs of life. A psalm that feels so apt as we journey through this pandemic – God is with us.

God the shepherd, David the shepherd, good shepherds, bad shepherds, the kingdom of God, God's presence in difficult times -all of these things are in the background when Jesus comes along and in this morning's Gospel reading and highlights that He is also a good shepherd. Elsewhere in the gospels of Mark and Luke, Jesus asks, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." (Lk 18:19, Mk 10:18). God is the Good Shepherd. Jesus as God incarnate highlights what this means and the Way we can follow.

Now, it feels important that we recognise that 'Good' is not limited to being the opposite of 'bad'. The Greek word 'kalos' could be better translated as beautiful, worthy motivating, inspiring. All of these words, then, depict Jesus as 'the model' shepherd. In fact, the life-giving, image of Jesus as Shepherd dominated Christian imagery for the first thousand years. It wasn't until the 10th century that the crucifixion began to make its appearance, eventually claiming centre stage in the Christian landscape. Yet, in spite of this, throughout history and across cultures, artists have created depictions of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

This art and our Gospel reading highlight a shepherd who cares about his sheep so much that he knows them, so much that he stays with them, so much that they trust him: through the hard, through the easy, through the in between. A shepherd who cares so much that they trust Him, so much that they follow Him.

I wonder, do you hear and know his voice, this morning and every morning? Because Jesus calls each and every one of us to trust Him to follow Him and become the most amazing 'you' and 'us' that we can be. He will stay with us: through the ups and downs of life, the hard, the easy, the weird, the wonderful, the exciting, the scary and everything in between. And when we trust Him when we follow Him, he asks us to be not just sheep but also shepherds. Jesus is a shepherd whose example, His Way, highlights how we can each and every one of us can be shepherds too.

Being shepherds in our care for those who are sick and housebound.

Being shepherds in our support for Christian Aid's vaccination appeal. Being shepherds in our concern for the Leprosy Mission. Can we imagine doing that? Being shepherds for those in need in our lives, our city, our world? The theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer declares that: "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and cancelling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions."

This Sunday, I leave you with the hope that each and every one of us can live our lives "interrupted by God" by opening our eyes, opening our ears; opening our lives to neighbours near and far. And as we go out this week, let us allow Jesus' example, His Way to inspire us to be like the Good Shepherd in our lives and world today and every day. Amen.

Song for Responding R&S 558

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 your self 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.



Prayers for our world and those we love

Jesus, we pray to you, the Good Shepherd

Many so-called shepherds, leaders, influencers vie for our attention and loyalty. May the church give her loyalty back to you so that we may proclaim your message of salvation, healing and your way of service boldly as the Apostles proclaimed it. Help us recover our power and so bring that message to the world with lasting and eternal effect.

Lord you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. May people from all walks of life and in all positions of power and influence, follow your way of love and selflessness. May the powerful and rich and those at the centre, identify with the weak, the poor and the marginalised to bring dignity, opportunity and sustenance of both body, soul and Spirit.

As you laid down your life so comfort and sustain those who are suffering: those still affected by both Covid and its effects; those who are grieving, those who are ill and in hospital and those denied other treatments because of the strains of this pandemic. Give hope and help to those whose lives and livelihoods have been disrupted by our current crisis.

Lord, as you led David in humility from the simplicity and poverty of life in the fields to a royal House, sitting at a table groaning with good things, so lead the rulers of nations in humility and simplicity today. <ay they lead us into places of justice, generosity and peace. We pray for places in the world where there is strife: in Minneapolis, in Eastern Ukraine, in Yemen and Myanmar, in Afghanistan and Syria - and we pray for your peace.

Lord, as the Good Shepherd, you know your sheep - you understand our need for protection and to be led to good pastures. So lead each one of us in our daily circumstances. May we know your care that we may, out of the abundance of all you give, overflow with goodness and strength to others, in both words and actions. We pray this for ourselves and for those we love who are in need at this time whom we name before you now (*remember the names of those for whom you are concerned here*)

And we ask all these prayers in the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer.

Hymn R&S 345

Guide me, O my great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty; hold me with your powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore, feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain, where the healing waters flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer, ever be my strength and shield, ever be my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's Destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises I will ever sing to you, I will ever sing to you.

Blessing

May Christ the good shepherd
enfold us with love,
fill us with peace,
and lead us in hope, to the end of our days;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
be among us and remain with us always.
Amen.