

Easter 4 Diocesan streamed service - 25 April 2021 - The Good Shepherd
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Archdeacon of Lewisham & Greenwich

Songs and hymns in BSL: <https://christianbsl.com/music/>

Thanks to the congregation at St Saviour's Brockley for permission to film the service with them.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

White

Principal Service

The reading from Acts must be used as either the first or second reading.
Acts 4.5–12

⁵ The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let 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. ¹¹This Jesus is

"the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;
it has become the cornerstone."

¹²There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

Psalm 23

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; ♦
therefore can I lack nothing.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures ♦
and leads me beside still waters.
- 3 He shall refresh my soul ♦
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; ♦
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5 You spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me; ♦

you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.

6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, ♦
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

1 John 3.16–24

¹⁶We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²²and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

[NRSV]

John 10.11–18

¹¹'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The 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. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I 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. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No 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.'

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.

Post Communion

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.

Additional Collect

Risen Christ,
faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep:
teach us to hear your voice
and to follow your command,
that all your people may be gathered into one flock,
to the glory of God the Father.

Sermon

Well, you may have heard about sheep bleating - but have you ever heard of sheep tweeting?

No??!

Currently I am an archdeacon of a rather urban area (although not completely devoid of farm stock!)

Historically more of my ministry has been in much more rural areas
- on the Peak District edge of Sheffield,
and for quite a number of years in Sussex.

Amongst those I follow on social media,
and occasionally get to see on Twitter
are a flock of
Herdwick sheep from Derbyshire,
seeing their photos, hearing their stories.

We are used to thinking of sheep
following a shepherd,
so I take the point there is something quirky
about me
following a flock of sheep,
if only following virtually,

and on Twitter.

These here, on this occasion, aren't the Derbyshire Herdwick sheep ,
these sheep are on the Malvern Hills,
between Birmingham and Wales,
not far from Worcester.

It can be helpful occasionally
to see the world from a radically different perspective -
and as Jesus talks about being
the good shepherd -
there is something that resonates.

There are elements of the good shepherd
leading the sheep,
that even for those of us living day-to-day in more urban settings,
that is still important.

And occasionally more than important - vital.

As individuals,
we are still acutely aware of
the circumstances that surround us
the dark valleys we sometimes face,
even fierce wolves that can create terrors for us.
Metaphorically - but none the less real.

No wonder we crave the opportunity for being led through green pastures
and by still waters,
as the Psalmist has just reminded us
in that most familiar of psalms.

The motif of the Good Shepherd
is an ancient
and well founded biblical theme.

It is not just in Psalm 23;
it is in Psalm 80, and 100 too.

Biblical examples go back as far as the book of Genesis,
where in Chapter 48 God is identified
by Joseph,
as a shepherd.

Both Moses
and David
are recorded as looking after flocks of sheep.

Micah in ch7 calls on God to
"Shepherd your people with your staff,
the flock that belongs to you,"

The pastoral idyll though that we see here,
however,
or even within the psalm,
are not the angle that Jesus takes in our Gospel.

Jesus warns about hired hands,
not as interested in the sheep
as in the remuneration.

Ezekiel, too, warns of false shepherds in ch 34,
contrasting them with the true shepherd.

I am guessing that not many of us would consider shepherding
to be a high risk calling though,
would we?

It's not exactly lion taming,
or rattler wrestling, is it?
A bit of watching for a butt up the backside
from time to time
maybe?

Yet something really struck me
very powerfully
in today's gospel reading

Jesus talks 4 times in these verses about
laying down his life for the sheep.
4 times,
in 8 verses.

There is a real focus on
the protection of the sheep
and the risk for the shepherd

In the early part of John 10,
Jesus talks of shepherds, generally.

Here he talks of himself as not the shepherd,
but the Good Shepherd.

This good shepherd isn't like the false shepherds,
or even like the hired hands
who may scarper at the first sign of any difficulties.

This good shepherd is here for the long haul,
for every life and death situation.

Life is more important for the sheep

than it is for the shepherd in this passage.

There is a powerful sense of the vitality
Jesus wants for his sheep,
a Life in all its fulness.

We of course know that Jesus is speaking of his death, and his resurrection.

We are an Easter people after all!
- though here in John 10 we are still a long way from the revelation of Jesus as Messiah,
and his death and resurrection.

It remains a hallmark of Jesus ministry though:
That is why our Gospel reading
is shot through with the reminders
of the cost to Jesus
of the salvation he brings

Had we also had our epistle reading
from 1 John 3, it is there as well,
“ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us”

It is the focus of Peter’s trial in Acts 4,
that we had for our first reading:
it was because:
“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.’

It is Jesus death that brings life.
That is why he is the Good Shepherd.

What Amazing Grace
that found a wretch like me:
I once was lost,
but now I’m found!
Found by the Good Shepherd.

The Gospel passage has another element hidden within it, sometimes gone over so
quickly it might be missed.

I worked for a while in a Team Ministry, and a new couple came to join us in ministering
in the team.

One of the couple said at one point to the other ‘do you think we will find PLUs here?’

I had no idea what a PLU might be,
and I was bold enough to ask.

PLU - oh, People Like Us.
was the response.

Well, I thought to myself
that's an interesting one.

My experience is that churches are so mixed,
that, usually,
most people will indeed find
some PLUs in a church.

But,
- and it is a big but,

Not everyone will be.

That is the glorious mix of the people of God,
of the members of the church,
of the sheep in this
or almost any other flock.

There will most likely be some PLUs,
and quite a lot of
PMUUs.
People
Most
Unlike Us.

Jesus even warns us:
There's this flock, and there are others.
And some of them are coming to join us too - so we need to be ready for that:

16 "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.
I must bring them also,
and they will listen to my voice."

We need to expect that
just as Jesus brought us as lost sheep into his field,
he will continue to do so.

They will turn up in our churches,
and in our schools,
they will turn up in our work places
and in the house next door.

Some will come for other parts of the country,
and from other countries,
BAME, UKME, UKHK,
from Europe, and Africa, from the Pacific Rim,

bringing their gifts and expertise,
their culture and cuisine.

And some of them will become our friends,
and some even become part of our families.

That's what Jesus does in bringing his flock together.
Sheep of every shape and colour.
"So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

One flock, one shepherd.

One of the things you sometimes see
when you see sheep and shepherds
is the shepherd's crook.

Different areas of the country specialise in different crooks apparently,
some with wide hooks
for catching sheep around a neck -

others smaller and narrower,
for catching a leg.
Rescuing a sheep out of trouble,
gathering them back in
for treatment
or attention.

We are all familiar with them.

The shepherd's crook is also a key emblem of the bishop.
It is their pastoral staff, their crozier.
Here is Bishop Karowei,
newly made bishop
with his new pastoral staff in his hand
alongside Bishop Christopher
holding his, as the diocesan bishop, the chief shepherd in our diocese.

There is a joke sometimes told against archdeacons:
Some wise crack once observed that
The archdeacon
is 'the crook'
at the top of the bishop's staff

'the crook'
at the top of the bishop's staff

Well, when I say joke,
obviously, it's not one
that archdeacons find funny...!

Although, actually, in practise in our diocese

the archdeacons and bishop's have a close working relationship together.

The archdeacons are the Bishop of Southwark's archdeacons,
but working closely with the Area bishops
in what we call Trios -
and here were some new archdeacons some years ago.

'the crook' at the top of the bishop's staff?

Well if this sort of crook is about reaching the lost,
about incorporating the outsider,
rehabilitating the offender,
of being part of the toolset
that keeps the flock safe,
then this archdeacon
is well up for being that sort of a crook for the kingdom!

May you become more aware, daily,
of the cost the Good Shepherd
has paid to keep you, his lamb,
safe in the flock.

May you know
There is salvation in no one else,
for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals
by which we must be saved.'

May you know you are safe because of
the Good Shepherd
caring for you and keeping you safe.

May you know you are part of the one flock,
with the one Good Shepherd.

Prayers

We pray to Jesus who is present with us to eternity.

Jesus, light of the world,

bring the light and peace of your gospel to the nations ...

Jesus, Lord of life,

in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, bread of life,

give food to the hungry ...

and nourish us all with your word.

Jesus, Lord of life,

in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, our way, our truth, our life,

be with us and all who follow you in the way ...

Deepen our appreciation of your truth

and fill us with your life.

Jesus, Lord of life,

in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, Good Shepherd who gave your life for the sheep,

recover the straggler,

bind up the injured,

strengthen the sick

and lead the healthy and strong to new pastures.

Jesus, Lord of life,

in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, the resurrection and the life,

we give you thanks for all who have lived and believed in you ...

Raise us with them to eternal life.

Jesus, Lord of life,

in your mercy, hear us,

accept our prayers, and be with us always.

Amen.

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