

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Deacon Jacqueline Esama-John for you to use in this time of coronavirus and roadmaps out of lockdowns. As pandemic restriction eases, we look forward to a time when “we will all be together again” as the queen said back in 2020. I pray that you will find the service uplifting and that God will meet you in your need, whatever that might be. Amen.

Call to Worship

Come, let us enter his gate with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. Jesus the Good Shepherd calls our names to come and follow him. Meet us wherever we are, loving God and fill us with your love, that we may see your world with compassion, serve with joy and give generously as members of your beloved community. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen.

Introduction

It is the 4th Sunday of Easter! The church is actively participating in the mission of God and proclaiming the good news of the resurrected Christ in word and deed. In the fifty days of Eastertide, John, the writer of the gospel highlights the basic principles of Christian community using metaphors of shepherd and sheep, vine, and branches etc, emphasizing that the Christian community is defined by its ability to proclaim the

good news of Jesus and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

The 4th Sunday of Easter is commonly known as Good Shepherd Sunday because it includes both Psalm 23 and the John 10 readings. The theme for today’s service is “Jesus the Good Shepherd” - a very familiar phrase and indeed one of Jesus’ most famous sayings is found in our gospel reading appointed for today at verse 11 of chapter 10 of John’s gospel. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”. We also hear echoes of this in Psalm 23 which is also one of our readings appointed for today. In both the Old and New Testaments, the image of the shepherd and his sheep has brought comfort and strength throughout the ages. Jesus is calling us to this same kind of noticing and paying attention and to be God’s presence in the world.

Opening prayer

Loving God, whose son Jesus is the Good Shepherd of your people, grant that when we hear his voice, we may know him who calls us each by name and follow where he leads us.

Amen.

Hymn: Tell me the old old story – Hymns & Psalms 232

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/0AfHAQfVqs4>

Tell me the old, old story
of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory,
of Jesus and his love.

Tell me the story simply,
as to a little child,
for I am weak and weary,
and helpless and defiled.

Refrain:

*Tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story,
tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and his love.*

Tell me the story slowly,
that I may take it in -
that wonderful redemption,
God's remedy for sin.

tell me the story often,
for I forget so soon;
the early dew of morning
has passed away at noon:

Refrain:

*Tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story,
tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and his love.*

Tell me the story softly,
with earnest tones and grave;
remember I'm the sinner
whom Jesus came to save.

Tell me the story always,
if you would really be,
in any time of trouble,
a comforter to me.

Refrain:

*Tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story,
tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and his love.*

Tell me the same old story
when you have cause to fear
that this world's empty glory
is costing me too dear.

Yes, and when that world's glory
is dawning on my soul,
tell me the old, old story:

"Christ Jesus makes thee whole."

Refrain:

*Tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story,
tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and his love.*

Katherine Hankey (1834-1911)

Let us pray together

Loving God, in this season of Easter we continue to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To you alone belong glory, honour, and praise. We rejoice in the life of Jesus, the good shepherd, who knows each sheep by name as well as by nature. We thank you that we are safe within your embrace, that you continue to accompany us, lead, and guide us in the paths of righteousness. To you loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Be all glory, honour, and praise. Now and for ever.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Loving God,

We have sinned against you in what we have thought, said, and done.

We have not loved you with our whole heart.

We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong.

Forgive us for the sake of your son,

Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Silence

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is his gracious word.

Your sins are forgiven.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

(The Methodist Worship Book P. 29)

**A reading from the Old Testament- Psalm 23
New Revised Standard Version**

Psalm 23 The Divine Shepherd

A Psalm of David.

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

A reading from the New Testament: John 10:11-18
New Revised Standard Version

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² 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. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ 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.”

Reflection

So, I am here at Ponders End Methodist Church food hub, a project which was birthed in this community last year in response to the needs of people living in the crisis of the Covid-19 Pandemic. There is a sense in which this is a Good Shepherd project. You might say that we are not on a farm or there is no sight of a shepherd and sheep around here, but I can tell you that the hub has been a place of still waters, God cares for his people and leads us beside still waters. He restores our souls, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation etc. And it does not matter what our religious background is or whether we have no faith at all. What matters is that God is present with us and this enables us to form healthy relationships with the many people who come through these gates every single week. It is a place of restoration of human dignity, a table of handouts prepared in the valley of deep uncertainty about a world in a pandemic, in the presence of multiple variants of the Covid-19 virus. A cup that overflows with compassion. This is part of telling the old old story of Jesus and his love.

In both our old Testament and gospel passages today, we hear a lot about this relationship between the sheep and shepherd and in the John text, we find Jesus foretelling self-sacrificial love using the image of a shepherd and his flock to help us understand the kind of intimate relationship he has with his father God as well as with us, his followers. Sheep and shepherd were a large part of life in the ancient near eastern countries. The relationship between the shepherd and sheep is very important. Why? We might want to ask. Some people might want to think that sheep are 'dumb' animals who are 'stupid' because they are totally and utterly dependent on their shepherd. If you ever had the opportunity of spending time in a farm, you might come to the realization that there is more to sheep than meets the eye. Even though they go around in small flocks, accompanied by the shepherd of course, each sheep is an individual and each has a unique relationship and personal experience with their shepherd. The shepherd's love is a presence, not for a fleeting moment but for ever. Similarly in telling the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18: 10-14), Jesus was emphasizing the love and compassion that God has for each individual human being - the shepherd left his flock of ninety-nine (99) sheep to go find one (1) lost sheep. There are also echoes of this kind of love and caring in Luke's gospel (Luke 15: 7) where Jesus says "I tell you

that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. What a powerful testament to the love of God in Christ Jesus for all his creation.

The story of Jesus the good shepherd is a powerful story which focuses on the intimate nature of God's love for us, which then evokes our love for others. The eternal love of God revealed to us in Christ, is constantly opening up new paths for us, inviting us to make Christ's love and welcome known to all people. The apostle Paul gave counsel to the Ephesian elders to "keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood (Acts 20: 28-NIV) Peter also encouraged church leaders to "be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care..." (1 Pet 5: 2)

Jesus is the shepherd who stops at nothing, not even death in caring for his flock. The shepherd has responsibility to lead the flock to places where they could find good grazing and water to drink as well as to protect them from harm. It must be said however that there are also bad shepherds who do not look after their sheep as best as they could do. There are numerous examples of bad shepherds in both the old and new Testaments. This could be the reason Jesus wants to make this claim for being the Good Shepherd.

In the gospel passage in John 10 that we are looking at today, Jesus is making comparisons with a shepherd who owns his flock to that of a hired worker (verse 12-13). The shepherd who owns his flock is more committed to their safety and well-being as opposed to the hired worker who is just doing a job and so the hired worker runs away, leaving the sheep to the mercy of the wolves. The prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 34:1-4) made a call for bad shepherds to account for their negligence. According to Ezekiel, “the shepherds of Israel have been feeding themselves instead of feeding the sheep? Ezekiel accuses them of not strengthening the weak, or healing the sick or binding up the injured, bringing back the strayed, or seeking the lost, rather he says you rule them with force and harshness ⁵So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and scattered, they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with no one to search or seek for them.....”

As a deacon engaged in community, I am constantly wrestling with radical openness and hospitality. One thing that is particularly striking for me in this passage is verse 16 in which Jesus says “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd”. In the context in which this passage is written, it might be reasonable to think

that these ‘other sheep’ are the Gentiles. There is a real openness to embrace the ‘other’ - a reminder of Paul’s exhortation in (Galatians 3:28)²⁸ “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”. Therefore, the love about which Jesus speaks demands relationships extended to all, regardless of who they are. Love is the impetus, the compelling force that says through the mercy and grace of God, we are truly capable of extending the same to one another- an expression of God's love for people and the community that emerges as people return that love to God.

In my context here in Enfield, I have the privilege of meeting people whose social and financial needs bring them to places like food banks or food hub such as this one I am in right now. Often, these meetings last a few minutes but have enabled me to live out my ordination vows and fulfil my calling. My duties at this food hub are born of responsibility: responsibility to my God, responsibility to humanity and responsibility to the church. I come here every week to minister to the needy people in our community, to support the weak, to bind up the broken, to welcome the stranger, to emulate Christ the good shepherd. The length and nature of my interactions with people here vary from person to person, conversations are interspersed with the act of handing out food parcels, face masks, newspapers/magazines, personal hygiene items as well as clothing and a lot more.

The letter of John in 1 John 3: 17, reminds us that “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?” Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said that “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” *My prayer is that* as believers we will endeavour to emulate Jesus the good shepherd, to love with actions and truth and not merely with words or speech.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

(During our prayers today, I will use some phrases from the hymn, The King of love my shepherd is – STF479. I invite you also to observe some moment of silence in between the prayers)

Let us pray

The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.

We call to mind all the leaders of the world that, using Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd as the ultimate model of leadership, they would lead and care for their own flocks in such a way

that peace might abound, righteousness flourish and injustice be eradicated.

Silence

Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.

We call to mind strangers in our midst. We lift up those who are hungry, those who are homeless, those facing uncertainties about their health, relationships or jobs. We remember the way the early Church lived in one heart and mind, sharing everything they had - may we too be always mindful of the needs of those less fortunate than ourselves and always welcome the newcomer and the stranger joyfully into our midst.

Silence

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.

We call to mind those who are anxious and do not know your peace and for those who are struggling with their lives. We ask for your healing on those who are sick, your strength for those who are tired and your love for those who live with despair and fear.

Silence

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.

We call to mind those who now walk in the valley of the shadow of death. We know that you are with them and have gone before them to prepare a table overflowing with all good things. Guide those who mourn the loss of a loved one in the paths of righteousness and uphold them in their sorrow with the assurance of your goodness and love.

Silence

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
Thy unction, grace bestoweth:
And O what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth!

We give thanks for the gift of the covid-19 vaccine which is being rolled out across the world. We praise you for the brighter, warmer, and longer days of spring. As we follow the roadmap out of lockdown, we pray that our faith will be strengthened and look forward to reuniting with our family and friends.

Silence

And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.

We call to mind our work in this circuit. We pray for the circuit leadership team as they continue to make decisions and plans for congregations coming together for the reopening of churches. We ask for wisdom and discernment for all our outreach projects. We give thanks for Kathleen's work at The Space project and we offer to you the next steps in the development of the project... Guide us each day as we minister to one another, to our community and to the world. Help us each day to bear witness to your name and to do your bidding, always mindful of your amazing love for us. We pray these prayers in Jesus' name.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. 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.**

Hymn: The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want – StF 481-

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/-elQQayhpak>

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
and He anoints my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
for you are with me, and your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know.

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Benediction

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. **Amen.** (Hebrews 13: 20-21) **Amen.**