

Easter 4 Service – 3rd May 2020

(With my thanks to the Church of Scotland for prayers)

Good morning, afternoon, evening - depending on when you choose to read this and welcome. We are still in Easter season (Easter 4) and of course we are into our sixth week of lockdown. The lectionary this week only gives us one reading from the old Testament – Psalm 23. The gospel reading is from the gospel of John 10: 1-10, which reflects upon Jesus being the good Shepherd to us his sheep. It is about his never-ending goodness and mercy towards us, even though we don't deserve it, and obviously links with the Psalm.

As we still sit in our own isolation, I want to spend more time focusing on the reading from Acts 2: 42-47, which is Luke's description of what the early church was like. But let us settle and hear the call to worship:

Call to worship

Leader: Come, one and all,

Response: and join us in this place.

Leader: Come, one and all,

Response: and seek the voice of God.

Leader: Come, one and all,

Response: Christ calls us to be here.

Leader: Come, one and all,

Response: and sing your praise to God.

Hymn.

Rather than have you read Psalm 23, I thought we could sing it using Stuart Townend's version – please use Youtube reference for music if you wish.

The Lord's My Shepherd by Stuart Townend –

<https://youtu.be/pN4tPkX0MG0>.

Singing the Faith No 481

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.

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Having sung his praises, let us settle ourselves ready for our

Prayers of adoration and confession.

Let us pray:

Lord God You are our Saviour and king
our Master and friend
our Shepherd and guide.
Wherever we go, You are with us.
Wherever we stray, You seek us out.
Whenever we call, You hear us.

You are our promise and our hope
our place of rest and peace

our security and our sureness.
Whoever we are, You accept us.
Whatever we do, You love us.
Whenever we fall, You lift us up.

Lord God
we come to this place
from different places,
different lives, different situations,
with different concerns
and different dreams.
Yet we come as one,
a people of shared faith
in a God who shared all.

And so we praise You, Lord God,
that You have risen from the dead
to fulfil Your promise to all creation;
we praise You that you have
gifted us Your spirit
as a companion and guide.
We praise You that you have
chosen us as Your people
to build Your kingdom here on earth.

Gracious God
our path in life does not always
lead us into quiet, calm places
of caring and compassion for others.
Our journey often takes us
off the beaten track and into the
difficult terrain
of selfishness and anger.
Our progress is often slowed
by fear and anxiety.
Yet You remain at our side, Lord,
to comfort and provide,
reminding us of Your promise
that all is forgiven for all time.
And so we praise You, Lord,
that you bless us anew each day
with Your grace and goodness.
That You open doors to fresh
opportunities
and that You lead us by the hand
to a place we can call home.

Take us from here, refreshed in our
journey
with You and with one another,
that we might love You more
and follow You more closely.

In Jesus' name.

**Amen
and we say the prayer Jesus
taught us.... Our Father...**

The gospel reading, for today is
John 10:1-10

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

10 "I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! **2** But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. **3** The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. **5** They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice." **6** Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, **7** so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. **8** All who came before me^[a] were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. **9** Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. **10** The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

Then I would like us to focus on the reading from Acts 2: 42-47

The Believers Form a Community

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.**43** A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs

and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation.

Hymn.

"Here I Am To Worship" (Tim Hughes) –

<https://youtu.be/-MmRGSEG2LM>

Singing the Faith No 175

Light of the world,
you stepped down into darkness,
opened my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore
you,
hope of a life spent with you.

So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.

King of all days
oh so highly exalted,
glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came
to the earth you created,
all for love's sake became poor.

So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.

And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.

So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.

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Some thoughts on the passage from Acts

"The believers devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and their prayers. A deep sense of awe came over them all."

I have spent a number of years now regularly coming back to this example of church life and wondering how, or even if, we can ever emulate that lifestyle. All of a sudden, I feel we have been shaken out of, dare I say a complacent lifestyle, so that much of our lives has been turned upside down. Nearly 6 weeks of lockdown has a lot to answer for but yet, despite the large and ever-increasing number of deaths, it seems to be working and the majority appear to be safe.

I must say that I am very thankful that I have someone that I can instantly turn and talk to. I do not envy those at home alone. The telephone/Mobile have come into their own and I guess many of us are learning new skills in social media techniques.

One set of my notes tells me that these verses are "a compact description of Christian discipleship, a snapshot of life and witnessing the

new, young church. They present an ideal which is far from what most of us experience today." These verses do not provide prescriptive rules, regulations or structures for Christian living. However, I like to think that they present a picture of how the life and work of the Christian community can reflect the reign of God proclaimed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is important to, to remember that this fellowship would soon experience external opposition and internal disharmony that we could probably better relate to now.

How do you see your situation now? The first thing is we cannot meet as a community all in one place. I never thought I would miss services as much as I have done. It is the joy of sharing in hymns and prayer and I think I now have the answer to people who previously told me that they don't need church, they can worship Jesus on their own. There is that extra special thing when in a group and part of it has to be the need to feel part of a community. Since church is people, it is that community that helps worship. Isolated as we are, I hope we can all take offerings such as this and possibly by starting at a time agreed with others, we can enjoy the knowledge that we are still part of the community worshipping our God.

We can all continue in devoting ourselves to Jesus' and the apostles' teaching through continued studying of the Bible but it is so much harder now to share and discuss, obtaining a wider range of views. The telephone is the obvious way of creating a further conversation and discussion about issues that our studies may find. It is always good to talk things through and to work out whether our thoughts are at least valid even if sometimes they

may not be totally aligned with others thinking.

Sharing in meals at the moment seems impossible. I'm sure that all those who provide church meals, teas and coffees will be enjoying a break but may well be already wishing that they could restart. It is the camaraderie gained by joining with each other under God's wings that creates the atmosphere that is so enjoyable. We found out last week from the road to Emmaus that the presence of Jesus was only recognised in the breaking and sharing of bread. I did when I was thinking about this have some fantasy about a group people possibly being able to put in simultaneous orders for a takeaway to be delivered at the same time so that we could share in a meal at a specific time in our own homes. However, that will never create the extra chatter and information sharing is created when you join together as a group in one room.

Whilst praying in a group can lead to insights into God's world that one might not have thought of, praying is very much something that one can do on your own – indeed Jesus talked about finding a quiet space in order to focus upon and talk to God. I realise some of us have specific ways of praying for others – some keep diaries – some pray lists of people through the week – some need written reminders – some have the ability to trust to memory! While some may say that they struggle, what you're really doing is having a chat with your heavenly Father in whatever way you feel is right. He knows us and loves us and understands us in all our intricacies; we just need to open ourselves to his call and grace.

And that's just verse 42 covered!

The verses 44-46, given our current situation of lockdown, leave us with a problem. It talks in groups and gatherings and uses the word all and always talks in the plural not the singular. I think that I have already covered the bits about meetings, worshipping together and sharing meals. There is one verse that people do seem to get hung up on – the bit about selling property and possessions and sharing the money with all those in need. In one commentary I found this explanation:

“Luke describes a community that does not require dispossession of all one’s possessions. Believers do renounce the notion that they have an absolute right to their property, and they habitually share their possessions with members of the community who are in need.”

This, to me, makes a certain amount of sense in that there is an operation of “what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is yours” – in other words it can be the use of your property and possessions. This bit is still a problem for us in lockdown but we still have the ability to share money with those in need even if that may be giving through agencies or a “Just Giving” platform such as Captain Tom.

I have deliberately not spent time today on God as Shepherd because it is often addressed within the lectionary throughout the year. However, having very recently read day 16 of The Great 50 Days, I felt I should mention points that Sheena Maberly of Stockton Circuit made. She points out that we already have God’s unconditional love. It is not dependent upon our love for him, which is just as well. We are to share God’s love by caring for others and new opportunities will occur throughout our lives. At times, our care may not be appreciated but

remember that it is almost inevitable that we will be helped by the care of others at some point in our lives. Sharing ourselves is important.

The observant of you might have noticed that I have not addressed verse 43 because as followers of Christ we are all capable of miraculous signs and wonders.

So, in summary, the fact that we are in lockdown does not limit us at all in prayer. Our worship can still be completed through services on TV, radio, or like this through the Internet. Our study of the Bible can go on unabated. Find out the best ways you can of talking to people and discussing God’s kingdom in this world at this time. Just because we cannot physically join together as a group worshipping God, we can all still raise our voices in praise and awe. At present individually, let us continue to praise God for what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do in the future and may we in the near future come back together to share his glory together as one church.

Amen.

Now to our prayers for others: in each gap you could use a response “Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer” let us pray:

Provider God,
You have given us so much of
Yourself
in Your abundant love and grace.
But there are many who hunger,
many who are left out in the cold
while others reap the benefits
of a society based on greed.
We think of those who are homeless
or displaced,
Those who are exploited, those who
are poor. *Response*

There are many who yearn for rest

in lives which are restless and hard.
We think of those who work long
hours for little reward;
those who are discontent and
disillusioned. *Response*

There are many who struggle to find
the right path because life has taken
them a different, difficult route.
We think of those with addiction
problems,
those who turn to crime through
desperation,
of children whose home life is
chaotic. *Response*

There are many who are fearful
for themselves and for others.
We think of those in broken
relationships,
those who live with sickness,
those who are afraid of the future
and of being themselves. *Response*

There are many who have lost hope
that light
will ever penetrate their darkness –
we think of those who live with
loneliness,
grief, bereavement and rejection.

There are many who we walk
alongside
in their pain and suffering, their joy
and hope.
We think of them now in a time of
silence...
Response

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

and for our **final hymn**
Take My Life And Let It Be
<https://youtu.be/Gf11rReeWIs>
Singing the Faith No. 566

Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee,
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love,
take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King,
take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold,
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine,
it shall be no longer mine,
take my heart -- it is thine own,
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store,
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

Blessing

You are sought, seek peace.
You are loved, love justice.
You are protected, protect the weak.
You are safe, save the lost.
You are chosen, choose life.

May the Grace of our Lord, Jesus
Christ,
The love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us
always.
Amen.