

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 21 April 2024 - The Fourth Sunday of Easer

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Genesis 7.1-5 and 11-18; Acts 4.5-12 (this must be either first or second reading); Psalm 23;
| John 3.16-end; John 10.11-18

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Jane Rees, Priest - Associate Vicar, March (Benefice)

For the last three weeks of Easter, we've listened to some wonderful gospel stories about the Resurrection - the women who find the stone already rolled away and the tomb empty, Jesus meeting Mary in the garden where she thought he was the gardener; Jesus appearing to the disciples in the Upper Room, eating fish with them, encouraging them to touch his wounds and his side.

So far so good.

We believe with joy that Jesus rose from the dead and is the Son of God just as he said he was.

But have you ever wondered what sort of character Jesus really is?

What he thinks about and what is important to him?

Our gospel readings from today have a different emphasis - for the next four weeks up to Pentecost we hear not about the miracle of Jesus' resurrection and his appearances to the disciples, but we hear about his person - what his divine nature is like, and what is important to his Kingdom. We hear him speak of how much he cares for us and how he prayed authentically for his disciples, making clearer the importance of Love and abiding in his Love, and how he saw this as necessary for building his Kingdom.

Today that different emphasis starts - and we go back before the resurrection - and before the crucifixion to chapter 10 of John's Gospel, where we hear Jesus speak about himself with one of the most well-known images in our bible - the Good Shepherd.

Shepherding was a common occupation in the middle east - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all shepherds as was Moses and of course David. One thousand years before Jesus was born Psalm 23 describes the peace and nourishment that comes from following the leading of God the Shepherd.

This Christian metaphor of a shepherd and his sheep is one that we can relate to in the church today because as God's children each of us has a real tendency to wander through

temptation. We recognise too our helplessness spiritually to provide and protect ourselves and our loved ones from evil and sin. We know how much we need a Shepherd to guide us through this earthly life.

This morning Jesus encourages us with three statements:

he says firstly

'I am the Good Shepherd'. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

The job of a shepherd was a lowly job, and often a dangerous job out in rough and exposed terrain. Sometimes a shepherd would indeed be required to lay down his or her life for the sheep.

Jesus contrasts himself to the hired helper who flees when the wolf appears -

The Good Shepherd stays with the sheep - his actions speak louder than words.

His focus is not his own welfare but that of the flock - their protection, their pasture, their safety. The nearer the sheep stay to the shepherd the safer they will be.

In Jesus time sheep were often raised for no other purpose than to be an offering in temple sacrifices and would be fed good pasture to fatten them up for slaughter.

But here Jesus turns the tables and states he would rather die himself than lose one of his flock.

We see that there is no limit to God's love for us. And because of his divine protection no enemy can snatch us out of his hand.

For the Shepherd is always with us and will stay by our side no matter what.

Next we hear Jesus proclaim - "I know my own and my own know me"

The relationship between the sheep and their shepherd is built on familiarity. Sheep will not follow a strange voice. They recognise their shepherd and follow him.

We may not think of ourselves as sheep, but this is a term Jesus uses to describe His children. His sheep are all those who have trusted Him as Saviour—and they are the ones for whom He laid down His life. Our bible makes it clear how these sheep are identified: They know their Shepherd, they hear His voice, and they follow Him.

And thirdly Jesus says

"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."

Jesus is referring to us, the gentile church. Up to this point Jesus has been reaching the Jewish people but he looks ahead to a time after the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit when people from all nations will like us believe in him and follow him too.

Today in 2024, a third of the world's population are Christian. In different countries, continents and languages millions are hearing the gospel and the numbers are growing. Christianity remains the largest religion in the world.

Our world will not ever outgrow a need for the Shepherd. Today as we hear these encouraging words of Jesus, we give thanks for our Good Shepherd who is so loving and faithful; who promises to protect, to call and to lead us all the days of our life.

As we continue to rejoice in the resurrection, may we have the faith to respond when we hear his voice.

Amen.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder why you think Jesus chose to describe himself as a Good Shepherd?
- I wonder how you feel about being known by Jesus as a sheep?
- I wonder how you respond in your own life to the voice of the Good Shepherd?
- I wonder if you can encourage someone you know to learn about the way the Good Shepherd loves them?

Suggested intercessions

On this day that the Lord has made, let us pray for the people he has redeemed and let us thank God for his goodness.....

We pray for the unity of our worldwide church as she proclaims the gospel and for christian people everywhere that they may live joyfully in the knowledge of the love of the Good Shepherd.

From our Diocesan prayer calendar, we pray this week especially for the Anglican church of Australia.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We give thanks for all who are shepherds of your flock; we pray for all bishops, priests, deacons, and leaders in ministry. May they have a pastoral heart to care sacrificially for your people. May they stand and feed your flock in the strength of your name.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for the nations of the world, for wise and just leadership in areas of ongoing conflict, for peace and reconciliation where there is suffering violence and pain.

[We pray this week especially for the country / nation of]

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for our own communities; Good Shepherd, guide and enable all who lead and serve us and those on whom we depend for our daily needs. Grant that we may seek the peace and welfare of our communities.

[We pray especially this week in our communities for....]

We pray for those who have gone astray like sheep, especially our own loved ones: we pray that the shepherd and guardian of their souls may bring them home rejoicing.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We remember all those who are sick at this time and have asked for our prayers. May they know the comfort, wholeness, and peace of our Good Shepherd. Be with all who suffer at this time in body, mind or spirit and fill each of us with your holy compassion that we may be channels of your healing love.

[We lift to God by name those who have requested prayer....]

In a moment of silence let us bring our own prayers and petitions to God.

Silence.....

We remember all who have died in the faith of Christ, those who may be known to God alone and those whose anniversary of death occurs at this time. Good Shepherd remember for good those whom we love but see no longer. Help us to live this day in the sure and certain hope of your eternal victory.

[We name those known to us locally....]

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Holy Shepherd,
you know your sheep by name
and lead us to safety through the valleys of death.
Guide us by your voice,
that we may walk in certainty and security
to the joyous feast prepared in your house,
where we celebrate with you forever. Amen.

Let us commend the world in which Christ rose from the dead ourselves to the mercy and protection of God.

Amen.

Suggested hymns/songs

The King of Love my Shepherd is by H W Baker

Loving shepherd of thy sheep by Jane E Leeson

Saviour like a shepherd lead us by Henry F Lyte

Because the Lord is my Shepherd by Christopher Walker

The Lord's my Shepherd by various Crimond / Townend etc

Shepherd me O God by Marty Haugen

I will sing the wondrous story by Francis Rowley

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds by John Newton

I heard the voice of Jesus say by H Bonar

O the deep deep love of Jesus by Samuel Trevor Francis

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- reflectionary.org – lectionary-based resources
- engageworship – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)