

**WORSHIP AT HOME**  
**A SERVICE OF REFLECTION**  
**4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER - APRIL 25<sup>TH</sup> 2021**  
**GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY**



*There are some links to hymns- please be aware adverts sometimes run before the music!*

*You are invited to light a candle*

**WE COME TO WORSHIP AS THE BODY OF CHRIST**

Though we may be physically apart, we are one; we are the church of God, a gathered community, brought together in the bonds of peace, assembled today in thought and concern, in spirit, in love and in prayer. We offer up to the Lord, with thankfulness, the night that has now passed, and the day that lies before us.

*We hold a moment of silence as we prepare to worship God and to receive his holy word.*

**OPENING WORDS FROM PSALM 23**

Day by day, God leads us to the deep, deep pools of peace, to the green, lush lawns of grace.

Day by day, Jesus calls us to pour out ourselves in service, to anoint the stranger with hope.

Day by day, the Holy Spirit shows us the community we could be, the family we are called to become.

**HYMN - STF 65**

<https://youtu.be/xLMDEN8Y5f0>

Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom, come to him and bless his name.

Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever,  
faithful to the end of days.

***Refrain***

*Come then, all you nations,  
sing of your Lord's goodness,  
melodies of praise and thanks to God.  
Ring out the Lord's glory,  
praise him with your music,  
worship him and bless his name.*

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,  
risen from the snares of death.  
His word he has spoken, one bread he has broken,  
new life he now gives to all.

***Refrain***

Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow,  
Spirit of our God most high;  
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,  
splendour of the living God.

***Refrain***

Praise him with your singing, praise him with the trumpet,  
praise God with the lute and harp;  
praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing,  
praise God till the end of days.

***Refrain***

Ernest Sands (b. 1949)

## OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Great Shepherd of the sheep, you desire to guide all into safety, refreshment and peace. Meet us here today, each in our own place and fill us with your love and compassion, that we may look into your world with your loving knowledge. In your name we pray, Amen.

## CONFESSION BASED ON PSALM 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

*But, we are consumed with wanting more.*

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

*But other pastures seem greener. The waters aren't always still and our souls still thirst.*

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

*We think we know the right way, and complain along the path as we go, not heeding your call.*

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

*And yet, Lord, we are afraid. May we feel your presence, your comfort and your forgiveness anew.*

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

*And then sometimes we refuse to sit down at your table. Forgive us and help*

*us to see your overflowing mercy and respond to your gracious invitation.*

Surely 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.

*Forgive us, Lord and lead us into your house. Amen*

## HYMN – STF 443

[https://youtu.be/L\\_K31fzpkLE](https://youtu.be/L_K31fzpkLE)

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,  
tender and true ;  
out of the heart of the Father above,  
streaming to me and to you :  
wonderful love  
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,  
joyfully came ;  
came with the helpless and hopeless to  
dwell,  
sharing their sorrow and shame ;  
seeking the lost,  
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet ;  
why do they roam ?  
Love only waits to forgive and forget ;  
home, weary wanderer, home !  
Wonderful love  
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful  
love,  
come and abide,  
lifting my life, till it rises above  
envy and falsehood and pride ;  
seeking to be  
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Robert Walmsley (1831–1905)

## READING JOHN 10:11-18

*'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 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. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 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.'*

## READING ACTS 4:5-12

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

## REFLECTION

The imagery of shepherding occupies a prominent place in Old Testament literature; the shepherding Moses leads the people to freedom; David the shepherd boy becomes king; Isaiah speaks of God who, "tends his flock like a shepherd: [who] gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart [and] gently leads those that have young," and this motif is taken up through the gospels as Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd. In our own Christian heritage, we speak of clergy as shepherds who lead their "flock" and through this theme we are given a framework for the characteristics of leadership that God calls us to aspire to, both within the life of the church and in secular society, something that is pertinent as we come into the time for local elections.

Some years ago, a clergywoman keen to experience this relationship more deeply, went to work alongside a shepherd on a sheep farm on Iona; this is what she wrote of her experiences...

*"Within a few days of my time on the farm, I had the blisters and bruises to prove just how difficult it can be to tend to the needs of animals that frankly have their own ideas about what is good for them, and that can run faster, think more quickly and act more spontaneously than I can.*

*And the means that shepherds use to contain, control and maintain the health of the sheep can often appear to be really quite brutal. Sheep are strong animals, and holding them down to inject them with antibiotics, or pinning them upside down to trim their hooves, or forcing them into small pens in order to tag and treat and shear them, turns regularly into a full-blown wrestling match that isn't always won by the shepherd!*

*After six months of being thrown to the ground, run off my feet, stamped on and humiliatingly outwitted by these creatures, I had come to honour the profound love being described in the image of the shepherd, that motivates someone to go through all that and STILL be willing to love and nurture and even sacrifice their own life in the service of their flock."*

In his memoir *"The Shepherd's Life: A Tale of the Lake District,"* James Rebanks, a Cumbrian hill farmer recounts a very painful and sacrificial episode when his sheep in deep snow, needed to be taken to a place of safety. The oldest ewe followed him in the path he made through the snow, and the others came after her in a line, while Floss his dog, brought up the rear. When he reached a gateway to the place where the ewes would be safer, he pushed through the deep snow to make a little gully, followed by his faithful old ewe, bringing the rest with her. And then, he says, *"..I tumbled over as I hit a stone, and the old ewe walked over my legs, followed by eighty others, all of which are now on a mission....."*

It is very easy to get caught up in the romantic pastoral imagery of shepherding and the ideals which we hold to, forgetting just how hard, even brutal, leadership can be.

Just imagine reading a job advert that goes like this;

"Wanted! Someone to lead an independently- minded, curious and feisty flock.

- Must have great strength, but with gentleness to love and heal.
- Will be required to **know** the path ahead, and convey this with great wisdom and clarity.
- Must be cautious at all times, but willing to take risks.
- Must be prepared to maintain the health and direction of the flock in all seasons.
- Patience, complete knowledge of the flock, unswerving devotion to duty and a willingness to build up trust are essential qualities.
- Must be prepared to remain faithful, even whilst being trampled.
- The successful candidate will have a prerequisite to suffer.

"Not many would apply for that job" you might say, but people do as they answer the call to ministry or service within their church, to specific vocations in secular society, or perhaps even within the family unit.

We have high expectations of our leaders in various domains, be it in national or local politics, the armed services, business, industry, health and education as well as in the life of our churches. I cannot imagine how hard it

is for those who lead our country through this pandemic season, and yet we are willing to castigate them when they fall short, in our eyes. So today's gospel reading is really helpful in clearly identifying the basic hallmarks of good leadership to which we might aspire, and to consider the humanity of those who lead us in the context of leading a flock, and how we might respond kindly to them.

Whilst this piece of scripture might not have the answer to every dilemma of leadership, through the life and ministry of Jesus, the good shepherd, we are offered an exemplary role model upon which to base our judgements and form our expectations. Acts 4, speaks of the cornerstone, which in biblical times was regarded as the plumbline against which the position of all the other stones would be judged. Get them out of alignment with the corner stone and the structure would be unstable!

Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, models active leadership. In his calling, praying, responding, healing, teaching, suffering, and in laying down his life, and rising again, we see an active and authentic leadership. It matters to us that the words of a leader words match their actions; that way they know them to be authentic.

Jesus exemplifies the hefty and real cost of leadership. Good leaders are ready to sacrifice themselves rather than sacrificing others, and will hold their hands up when things on their watch go wrong. Out of love and at the cross, Jesus was prepared to take the lead; *"I lay down my life.....No one takes it from*

*me, but I lay it down of my own accord."*

This was a once-for-all-time sacrifice, but it still provides a model for leaders in terms of being prepared to make the personal sacrifices, so that others may benefit. The pandemic has sharpened up that view for us as we have witnessed medics, carers and hospital staff, amongst others, working at great and gruelling personal cost to themselves, sometimes to the point of death, which is where we are reminded that those who lead are just as fragile and vulnerable as we are, and experience the pains and hurts of the world.

It wasn't long ago that I listened to, and was moved by John Timpson's interview on Desert Island Discs, where he spoke about his life and his 1,400 shops. One of the things that stuck me was that he aimed to visit around 800 of his shops in person each year. He stressed the importance of this "shop floor" knowledge and investing his time in meeting with his employees. Jesus's life and ministry was marked by his immersion in and relationship with society on "the shop floor." He went amongst the people, taught and healed, and led his disciples. *"I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father."* Jesus is a leader with knowledge of his flock, taking an interest in the lives of others, keeping his ear to the ground, focussing upon relationship. Lose touch with the "sheep," and the sheep and the shepherd can get into difficulties losing their way; many a political career has floundered, when the elected have

forgotten the electors, enticed as they might be by the lofty heights of power, but so too are leaders broken by the trampling “flock”, that rampages over them without a thought given to the consequences of their actions.

So, as we consider leadership, particularly as we approach the local elections, may we consider the hallmarks of the good shepherd, who demonstrated, active, authentic, sacrificial, and knowledgeable leadership, ever mindful of the tasks laid before our leaders, and may we too be mindful of the gentleness of the good shepherd, as we respond to those who lead us and as we live out our Christian witness and calling in His name.

#### **HYMN- STF 481**

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

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.

#### **REFRAIN**

*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.

#### **REFRAIN**

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.

#### **REFRAIN**

Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

#### **INTERCESSION PRAYERS**

Holy and Gracious God, you call us by name, and beckon us to follow you. May we do so with your good grace.

Like a shepherd tending the flock you tend to our needs. Be present with those who struggle, suffer, or are in pain or sorrow. Guide those who are lost, or filled with worry and fear. Protect those who are in harm's way, heal those who are ill, mend those who are broken, as only your healing love can.

God of peace, watch over those who lead us in our various nations, governments, communities and churches. Fill our leaders with wisdom, patience, insight, and mercy. Help them to lead with kindness and strength.

God of love, fill our hearts with the knowledge of you that we can turn from the distractions of life and be more like you. May we be agents of your compassion, offering kindness to those we meet this day. Amen

God of all blessings, we thank you for all the gifts of life. For your Son, our Saviour, our great Good Shepherd, the one who stands at the gate of all life's challenges and joys, calling out to us in love.

Naming us, “Beloved.” For all this, and so much more we pray. 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.

And 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

### **FINAL REFLECTION AND CLOSING PRAYER**

*When so much shepherding has gone  
so wrong,*

*So many pastors hopelessly astray,  
The weak so often preyed on by the  
strong,*

*So many bruised and broken on the  
way,*

*The very name of shepherd seems  
besmeared,*

*The fold and flock themselves are torn  
in half,*

*The lambs we left to face all we have  
feared*

*Are caught between the wasters and  
the wolf.*

*Good Shepherd now your flock has  
need of you,*

*One finds the fold and ninety-nine are  
lost*

*Out in the darkness and the icy dew,  
And no one knows how long this night  
will last.*

*Restore us; call us back to you by  
name,*

*And by your life laid down, redeem our  
shame.*

And so we pray.....

God go with us. Help us to be an honour  
to your church. Give us the grace to  
follow Christ's word, to be clear in our  
task and careful in our speech.

Give us open hands and joyful hearts.  
Let Christ be on our lips. May our lives  
reflect a love of truth and compassion.  
Let no one come to us and go away sad.

May we offer hope to the poor, and  
solace to the disheartened. Let us so  
walk before God's people, that those  
who follow us might come into his  
kingdom.

Let us sow living seeds, words that are  
quick with life, that faith may be the  
harvest in people's hearts. In word and  
in example let your light shine in the  
dark like the morning star.

Do not allow the wealth of the world or  
its enchantment flatter us into silence as  
to your truth. Do not permit the  
powerful, or judges, or our dearest  
friends keep us from professing what is  
right. Amen

(Prayer of Alcuin of York adapted by Rachel Held- Evans)

**HYMN- STF 492**

**tune- be thou my vision**

<https://youtu.be/sEkStibCu k>

**alternative tune with vocals**

<https://youtu.be/Ym8iB29G6IU>

Christ be my leader by night as by day ;  
safe through the darkness, for he is the  
way.

Gladly I follow, my future his care,  
darkness is daylight when Jesus is  
there.

Christ be my teacher in age as in youth,  
drifting or doubting, for he is the truth.  
Grant me to trust him ; though shifting  
as sand,  
doubt cannot daunt me ; in Jesus I  
stand.

Christ be my Saviour in calm as in  
strife ;  
death cannot hold me, for he is the life.  
Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and  
its stain  
can touch my salvation ; with Jesus I  
reign.



Timothy Dudley-Smith (*b.* 1926)