

Sunday 25th April 2021

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

Lord God, wherever we may be we approach you now as your people, and the sheep of your pasture. We enter your gates with thanksgiving, and your courts with praise, for your steadfast love endures forever. AMEN

Hymn: The Lord's my shepherd StF481
Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/pN4tPkXOMG0>

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 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.

Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Let us pray together

Almighty and eternal God, glorious in power and purity, we adore you.

Creator and Lord of the universe, we are amazed that you care for us, and when we

were far off, you sought us in Christ, to bring us back to the fold of your love.

Forgive us that we still sometimes turn away from you like lost sheep.

Draw us back to you, we pray, assure us of your love, and enable us to share your love with others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

Today's Gospel Reading: John 10: 11 - 18

Time to Reflect

Sheep and shepherds are frequently mentioned in the Bible. Several prominent Old Testament figures spent time as shepherds, including Jacob, Moses, and, of course, King David.

The prophet Ezekiel speaks of shepherds who do not care for the sheep but are only interested in profiting from them (Chapter 34). The "shepherds" to whom he is referring are the kings of Israel who have badly failed their subjects. God, he says, will set up in their place his servant David, who will feed his people and be their shepherd.

Jesus referred to himself as "the good shepherd", who lays down his life for the sheep. This is in contrast with the hired hand who only wants his wages. Jesus is therefore declaring himself to be the fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy. He is the King, "born of David's line", who has come to establish God's own sovereignty over his people.

Shepherds in the UK today drive their sheep, often aided by a dog or two. This is very different from the shepherds of Biblical times

who led their sheep. The sheep knew their voices and would follow. Even in this country, however, lambs which are orphaned, or whose mothers do not have enough milk for them, are often raised by hand. They soon learn to recognise the person who feeds them, and like Mary's little lamb in the nursery rhyme, will follow them everywhere.

May we hear and recognise the voice of our own Good Shepherd, and follow him where he leads us, because we can always trust in his love and care.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that in Jesus you have given us a Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. We pray for those who give of themselves and take risks to serve others who are suffering or in danger. Grant them courage and endurance, and time for rest and refreshment.

We thank you for the compassion of the Good Shepherd, leading his sheep to still waters and safe pasture. We pray for those who work among the poor peoples of the world and care for the victims of abuse and neglect. Grant them determination, patience and empathy, and strength to go on in the face of disappointment.

We thank you for the love of the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep by name. We pray for those engaged in the pastoral care of the church. Grant them wisdom, understanding, listening ears and caring hearts.

We remember people we know who are facing times of difficulty or anxiety, sickness or sorrow. We pray that they may know the presence of the Good Shepherd and find in him comfort, strength, peace, healing and hope.

We pray for ourselves, that we may hear the call of the Good Shepherd in our own lives,

and follow, joyfully and trustingly, in his way of love.

We ask it in his name and for his sake. AMEN

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: In heavenly love abiding StF736
or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind
<https://youtu.be/sT0r9DaGbmQ>

In heavenly love abiding,
no change my heart shall fear;
and safe is such confiding,
for nothing changes here:
the storm may roar without me,
my heart may low be laid;
but God is round about me,
and can I be dismayed?

Wherever he may guide me,
no want shall turn me back;
my Shepherd is beside me,
and nothing can I lack:
his wisdom ever waketh,
his sight is never dim;
he knows the way he taketh,
and I will walk with him.

Green pastures are before me,
which yet I have not seen;
bright skies will soon be o'er me,
where darkest clouds have been;
my hope I cannot measure,
my path to life is free;
my Saviour has my treasure,
and he will walk with me.

Anna Laetitia Waring (1823-1910)
Based on psalm 23

A prayer of blessing

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. AMEN

(Hebrews 13: 20 – 21, Authorized Version)

Bible Reading: John 10: 11 – 18 (NRSV)

[Jesus said] “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.”