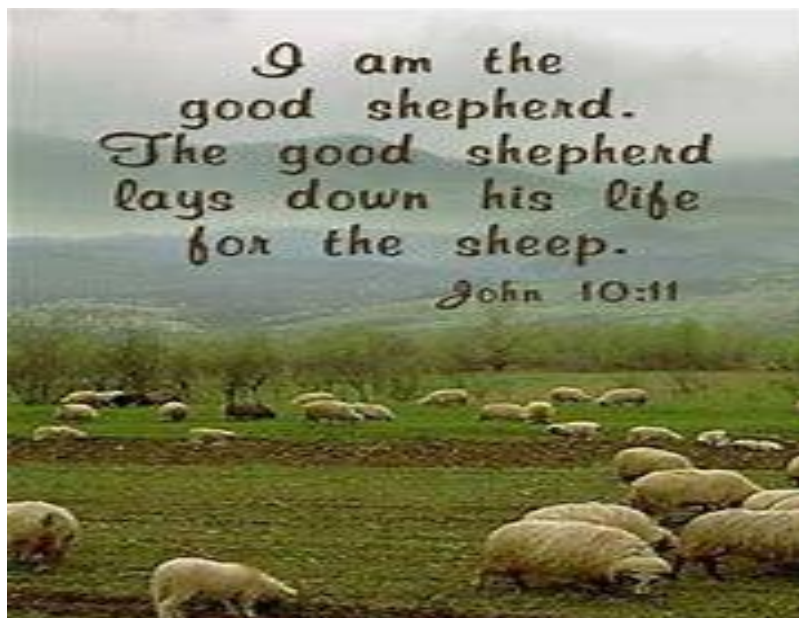


Shellrock Benefice

Service for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, May 3rd 2020



Abba, our God, as we take a pause, still and settle us, that hearing your Word and responding in prayer we may grow in love. Amen

Collect

Risen Christ, faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep: teach us to hear your voice and to follow your command, that all your people may be gathered into one flock to the glory of God the Father. Amen

Readings

Acts 2, 42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2, 19-25; John 10, 1-10

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil. For you are with me, your rod and your
staff, they comfort me.

You spread a table before me in the presence of those who
trouble me. You have anointed my head with oil and my cup is
running over.

Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of
my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Gospel [John 10:1-10](#)

¹"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter
the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is
a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the
shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for
him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep
by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his
own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him
because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a
stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do
not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶Jesus used this figure of
speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was
telling them. ⁷Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you,
I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who have come before me are
thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.
⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They
will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes
only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may
have life, and have it to the full.

Reflections



Because of the close connection between the Psalm and Gospel readings, today is often called Shepherd Sunday. Psalm 23, spoken, sung in various forms is of course the most famous of all the psalms. It's asked for at weddings, for funerals, recited by people who are very ill, learned by heart when at school and remembered when times are hard. How appropriate that these should be today's readings when we are in the situation of illness, fear of risk, and disconnection from each other.

The Gospel passage develops the theme, moving from the Old Testament imagery of the psalm to the wonderful assurance we find in Jesus as our Shepherd. The Easter message is that Jesus returns to us and will never let us go. Our assurance is based not on what we do or don't do, but on what Jesus is, as the Good Shepherd.

At the time of Jesus, the life of the shepherd was certainly not idyllic. The job was hard and dangerous and menial. Shepherds were rather rough round the edges, spending time in the fields rather than in more polite company. For Jesus to say "I am the good shepherd" would have been an affront to the religious elite of his day.

And then we have the image of the sheep. I have it on good authority that unlike cattle that are herded from the rear, this doesn't work with sheep. They prefer to be led, and they develop profound trust in the shepherd who is leading them. It becomes over time, an intimate relationship between the flock and the shepherd. The voice is key, apparently. Jesus knows

what he is talking about when he says "I know my own and my own know me".

The Lord is my shepherd. "I shall not want. He leads me beside the still water" And in our moments of loneliness, isolation, alienation and hopelessness, the Good Shepherd responds to our deepest yearnings for community by offering to calm our fears and insecurities. The Good Shepherd is a powerful image for us who particularly now are hungering for connection. Let us hold that image in our hearts.

Prayers

O blessed Jesus, you ministered to those who came to you. Look with compassion on all who today are suffering for whatever reason. We have been and continue to be concerned about those who have become ill because of the virus which has been afflicting people throughout the world, but we are also aware of the many who are ill for other reasons. We ask you to be near them in their pain. Amen.

Good Lord there are several people known to us who have died in the last few weeks. We have not been able to respond as a church family as we would like to have done. We recognise the sadness for those who are left behind, and we ask you to be with them in their pain. Amen

We give you thanks O Lord for all the commitment of those who are working at the front line of health and social care. There have been times when we have taken these services for granted, but now we are recognising the true dedication of those many people who care with great love for us when we are unwell or vulnerable. Amen

O Lord , we ask you to give wisdom to those who have responsibilities at local and national level for making decisions which impact on the many, and also the few. We ask that they be guided by a spirit of justice and remember those who are likely to have been impoverished, and have little power to change their situations. Amen

Good Lord, we continue to pray for scientists and all who are working in research, looking for a cure and also an alleviation of the suffering of those afflicted by the virus. 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

Blessing

May the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten our hearts and minds. Amen

