

21st April 2024 – Morning Service

I am the good shepherd

Jill Martin

Call to Worship - Philippians 2: 5-11

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

StF 272 – From heaven you came

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| 1) From heaven You came, helpless babe,
Entered our world, Your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve,
And give Your life that we might live. | 3) Come see His hands and His feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered. |
| Ch) <i>This is our God, the servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the servant King.</i> | 4) So let us learn how to serve,
And in our lives enthrone Him,
Each other's needs to prefer
For it is Christ we're serving. |
| 2) There in the garden of tears,
My heavy load He chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but Yours', He said. | |

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Prayer of Adoration

Lord God, our heavenly Father, we praise you for the Good News you have proclaimed to all nations through the life, the death and the resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. In him the humble are exalted; he binds the wounds of the broken hearted and sets the captives free. We praise you for his resurrection and the living presence of his Spirit in our midst today. May we celebrate the joy of that presence, the transforming power of the Good News Christ offers to all as we bring our worship, adoration and praise. In the power of Jesus, **Amen**

Prayer of Confession

Lord Jesus, you have called yourself Shepherd and commanded your church to feed your sheep, yet millions of our brothers and sisters are hungry and our society is spiritually impoverished. You came to give Good News to the poor, but we still measure people by their wealth and number of possessions. You came to set the captives free and yet all over the world men and women who speak out are imprisoned with little hope of release. You came to give sight to the blind, yet we hear your name and still wilfully shut our eyes to the things we have no desire to see. Risen Lord, we confess to our blindness, our selfishness and apathy, our faltering witness and hesitating service. Grant us this day your forgiveness and everlasting love, that we may live your risen life and truly care for your sheep, our brothers and sisters until that day when the whole world will call you Lord and praise your holy Name, **Amen**.

StF 338 – There is a redeemer

- 1) There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son.
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.
- 2) Jesus my Redeemer,
Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain.
- Ch) *Thank You, O my Father,
For giving us Your Son,
And leaving Your Spirit till
The work on earth is done.*
- 3) When I stand in glory
I will see His face,
And there I'll serve my King for ever
In that holy place.

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Reading: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

StF 479 – The king of love

- 1) The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.
- 2) Where streams of living water flow,
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.
- 3) Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home rejoicing brought me
- 4) In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With thee, dear Lord, beside me
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.
- 5) Thou spread'st a table in my sight
Thy unction grace bestoweth;
And O what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth!
- 6) And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.

Henry Williams Baker

Reading: John 10:11-18

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.'

'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep 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 are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.'

Sermon

Do you remember the 'old days'? There was a television programme hosted by Phil Drabble called 'One man and his dog'. A shepherd with his trained sheep dog(s) was required to drive about 6 sheep, whom had no experience of the dogs, through a multitude of tasks. Driving them from one area to another, driving them through a gate and the final achievement - separating one sheep from the others and getting them into a pen. Phil Drabble would give a commentary about the progress and marks for each activity added together until there was an overall winner of the series. It amazes me that it had high viewing figures and was on our screens for many years.

But of course there is far more to being a shepherd than winning competitions. In the Old Testament herds of sheep and goats were a mark of wealth and often family members were appointed to care for the flocks, they were too precious to be left in just anyone's care. *"Like a shepherd he will shepherd his own flock. With his arm he will collect together the lambs; and in his bosom he will carry them."* —ISAIAH 40:11. Shepherds are mentioned dozens of times throughout the Bible, from the first book, Genesis, to the last, Revelation. *"Now Abel became a shepherd of flocks"* Genesis 4: 2 Great men such as Abraham, Moses, and King David were shepherds. The psalmist David beautifully expressed the responsibilities and concerns of a good shepherd. And a psalm ascribed to Asaph mentions David as a shepherd over God's people of ancient times. — *"He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; he brought him from tending ewes to be shepherd over his people Jacob - over Israel, his inheritance. He shepherded them with a pure heart and guided them with his skilful hands."* Psalm 78: 70-72.

Later, in Jesus' day, shepherding was still a vital occupation. However Shepherds lived on the edges of Jewish society, they were often considered unclean and because of the nature of their occupation could not attend Temple services. Their commitment to their flocks was limited to their personal safety. They may not have been as diligent when counting their flocks and seeking the lost.

Jesus referred to himself as "the good shepherd" and often used the qualities of a good shepherd to teach important lessons. *"The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice....I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"* John 10: 2- 4, 11. Even God, is likened to "a shepherd." —*"The Lord is my shepherd; I have what I need. He lets me lie down in green pastures; he leads beside quiet waters. He renews my life; he leads me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your Rod and staff comfort me"*. Psalm 23 1-4

Shepherds in ancient Israel likely worked with, among others, the broadtail Syrian variety of sheep, which have large fatty tails and a thick fleece. The rams of this breed are horned, and the ewes are not. These docile animals are easily led and completely at the mercy of their environment and predators. Sheep have no sense of self-preservation and will blindly follow the leader into all manner of dangerous places. They have an amazing ability to see almost 360 degrees, they have an excellent sense of smell and keepers of sheep suggest that sheep are intelligent animals. However they cannot control the growth of their fleece and rely on shepherds to shear it for them. They struggle in moving water, even if shallow because their fleece will absorb water and become very heavy and waterlogged.

Shepherds also cared for goats. The goats were uniformly black or brown. Their long, flapping ears easily got torn on thorns and briar bushes as they clambered on rocky hillsides and grazed on shrubbery. The shepherd faced the ongoing challenge of teaching the sheep and goats to obey his commands. Good shepherds took tender care of the animals in their charge, even giving them names to which they would respond. Sheep can recognise the voice of their shepherd and even if two small flocks were joined together, the sheep would go to their own shepherd when called.— *"But I have other sheep that are not from this sheep pen; I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd"* John 10: 16

In spring, each day a shepherd might take his flock from a pen near his home to graze on the fresh, succulent growth in the nearby village pastures. During this season, the birth of lambs and kids would expand the size of the flock. At that time, workers would also shear the winter fleece from the sheep, and this was an occasion to celebrate! A villager might own only a few sheep. So he would hire a shepherd who would add the small flock to another one. Hired shepherds had a reputation for showing less concern for the animals of others than for their own. — *“The hired hand, since he is not the shepherd and doesn’t own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them.”* John 10: 12.

After the fields near the village were harvested, the shepherd would allow his sheep to graze on new shoots and on grain left among the stubble. When summer heat set in, shepherds moved their flocks to cooler pastures on higher ground. For days on end, shepherds would work and sleep outdoors, allowing the flock to graze on the steep green slopes and spending the nights guarding the open sheepfolds. At times, the shepherd might shelter his flock overnight in a cave, where they would be protected from jackals and hyenas. If the howl of a hyena panicked the flock of sheep in the dark of night, the shepherd’s calm reassuring voice would still them. Each evening, the shepherd counted the sheep and checked the health of the animals. In the morning, he would call, and the flock would follow him to the pasture ground. At midday, shepherds led the animals to cool pools of water to drink. When the pools dried up, the shepherd guided them to a well and drew water for them. Toward the end of the dry season, a shepherd might move his flock to the coastal plains and valleys. When the cold rains began, he would lead them back home to winter indoors. Otherwise, the animals could perish outside in the lashing rains, hailstorms, and snow. From November till spring, shepherds would not graze their flocks outdoors. Throwing some doubt on the timing of Christ’s birth, shepherds on the hillside were the first to be told and then share the miracle of the birth of God’s Son.

In return for the shepherd’s care, the animals provided the necessities of life —such products as milk and meat for the table. The fleece and skins were used as a medium of exchange and for clothing and bottles. Goat’s hair was spun into cloth, and both sheep and goats were used for sacrifices. Good shepherds were diligent, dependable, and brave. They even risked their lives to protect the flock. —*“David answered Saul Your servant has been tending his father’s sheep. Whenever a lion or a bear came and carried off a lamb from the flock. I went after it, struck it down and rescued the lamb from its mouth. If it reared up against me I would grab it by its fur, strike it down and kill it”* 1 Samuel 17: 34-35

Little wonder, then, that Jesus and his disciples used the shepherd as a model for Christian leaders. *“When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John do you love me more than these?’ ‘Yes Lord,’ he said to him, ‘you know that I love you.’ ‘Feed my lambs,’ he told him. A second time he asked him ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said to him, ‘you know that I love you.’ ‘Shepherd my sheep,’ he told him. He asked him the third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ ‘Feed my sheep,’ Jesus said.”* John 21: 15-17

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood” Like a good shepherd in Bible times, Christ is here to lead us and guide us, to places of safety in His care. He walks with us offering his love freely to all who choose to walk with him. We have a good shepherd who will never leave us and gave his life that we would be saved.

StF 247 – I danced in the morning

- 1) I danced in the morning when the world
was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the stars
and the sun,
And I came down from heaven and I
danced on the earth:
At Bethlehem I had my birth.
- 2) I danced for the scribes and pharisee,
But they wouldn't dance and they
wouldn't follow Me,
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John,
They came with Me and the dance went on.
- 3) I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame;
The holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and
they hung Me high
And they left Me there on a cross to die.
- 4) I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried My body and they
thought I'd gone,
But I am the dance and the dance goes on.
- 5) They cast Me down but I leapt up high;
I am the life that will never, never die.
I'll live in you if you live in Me;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said He.

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Prayer of Thanksgiving

Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that every good thing in our lives, home, friends and family, for all the beauty and loveliness in the world about us, which has lifted our hearts and made us glad, for life itself with all its promise and possibility. We thank you that in every great experience of life, when it seemed as though we were passing through water and fire we were not alone but you were there as Saviour and friend. We thank you that we are yours, created for your glory, that you have called us by name, that through Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep who lived and died and rose again for us you have redeemed us and that your love will never finally let us go or ultimately give us up. We thank you that so often you have come to us in the ordinary and everyday things of life in our work and in our leisure. Help us there to seek, find and serve you as in Christ you have sought, found and served us. We ask these things in the name of Jesus our good Shepherd. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

Good Shepherd we pray for those in need; the hungry and the homeless, the victims of war, the victims of disaster and for all those trying to alleviate need, charity and relief workers, peacemakers, medical and rescue staff.

In the name of Christ who gave his life for us **may your love be known and shown.**

Good Shepherd we pray for all those who suffer, the ill and the pain ridden, the lonely, the bereaved for those whose needs are known to us and for all those trying to alleviate suffering, doctors, nurses and carers, pastoral visitors, counsellors and concerned friends.

In the name of Christ who gave his love for us **may your love be known and shown.**

Good Shepherd we pray for all those who are lost, the regretful and bitter, those on the extremes of society, the empty and despairing and for all those trying to rescue them, therapists and counsellors, social and community workers, ministers and missionaries. Help us to offer those around us forgiveness and acceptance and new life in the Gospel.

In the name of Christ, who gave his life for us **may your love be known and shown. 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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 449 – Lord of creation

- 1) Lord of creation, to you be all praise!
Most mighty your working, most wondrous
your ways!
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,
And yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.
- 2) Lord of all power, I give you my will,
In joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.
Your bondage is freedom; your service is song;
And, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.
- 3) Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,
Rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to find;
What eye has not seen and what ear
has not heard
Is taught by your Spirit and shines
from your word.
- 4) Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;
I praise and adore you for all you impart,
Your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,
Your presence to shield me, whatever betide.
- 5) Lord of all being, I give you my all;
If e'er I disown you, I stumble and fall;
But led in your service your word to obey,
I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

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Blessing – STF 771

May the love of the Lord rest upon your soul.
May his love dwell in you throughout every day.
May his countenance shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May his Spirit be upon you as you leave this place.
The blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit go with you. **Amen**