

25th April 2021 – Morning Service

I am the Good Shepherd – so are you

Rev Josephine Soon

Introduction

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. The gospel reading from John contains Jesus naming himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Part of being a follower of Jesus is recognizing that we belong to the good shepherd. There is an element of Easter surprise here. The lamb of God is also the shepherd; the sheep are the children of God; and the stone rejected by the builders turns out to be the cornerstone. *I am the good shepherd, so you are.*

The Bible uses the word 'shepherd' and the word 'sheep' regularly. It frequently compares God's relationship to us with the relationship of a shepherd to his sheep. The difference to the actual shepherd and sheep relationship, we, spiritually as sheep, are expected to transform by the grace of God, to be more like Jesus and to shepherd others in our lives.

Call to Worship

Oh God, we are so preoccupied with counting sheep that we forget how much we need a shepherd. We are so preoccupied with numbers and statistics that we forget to leave the counting to you. You already know the sum of the hairs on the very heads that you have anointed. You know our days, our challenges, our successes and our needs. Today, we confess that our greatest need is for a shepherd. And the lesson we have yet to learn is how to be your sheep. **Amen.**

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

Prayer

We are standing at the gate, O loving Shepherd, not sure about the journey. But you have called our names, and in your voice we hear such love and surety. Bring us safely on the journey and strengthen us that we may serve you in all that we do. As we come to worship you now, may this be a sign for that we desire to get as close to you as we can. May our acts of worship show that we have chosen you, Jesus as our shepherd and we will tell everyone about the wonderful ways you rescue us.

Song – Shepherd of my soul

Shepherd of my soul I give You full control
Wherever You may lead I will follow
I have made the choice to listen for Your voice
Wherever You may lead I will go

Be it in a quiet pasture or by a gentle breeze
The shepherd of my soul is by my side
Should I face a mighty mountain or a valley dark and deep
The shepherd of my soul will be my guide

Marty Nystrom © Integrity's Hosanna! Music

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Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, **I shall not want.**

He makes me lie down in green pastures; **he 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 darkest valley, I 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 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.

Prayer of Confession

Lord Jesus, you don't force us to stay close to you. We have a choice each day to put ourselves in a position to hear the voice of the shepherd or not. Sheep do not easily follow a shepherd. For sheep to follow a shepherd, the sheep has to intentionally bond to Jesus, our shepherd. This is done by spending time with the shepherd. So now let us be still and spend our time with God in prayer of confession:

Patient and loving God, we stand at the gate and peer through. We keep creating our own ways, believing that we know what is in our own best interest, and we ignore the voice of the one Shepherd who will guide us to peace and hope. We wander aimlessly and then wonder why we get so lost. Help us stop and listen to the Shepherd's voice. Let us place our trust in the Shepherd who has never failed us, who loves and guides our lives. Forgive us our stubbornness and stupidity. For we ask this in Christ's Name. **Amen**

Even though we have wandered and have become lost, the shepherd calls to us. We can place our trust in his loving care. For we are the sheep of his pasture, blessed and given hope. **Amen.**

As we seek to follow you now, take our hearts, take and seal our hearts from your courts above.

StF 494 – Come thou fount of every blessing

- 1) Come, thou fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious measure
Sung by flaming tongues above;
O the vast, the boundless treasure
Of my Lord's unchanging love!
- 2) Here I find my greatest treasure:
'Hither by thy help I've come',
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed his precious blood.
- 3) O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be'.
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Take my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it from thy courts above!

Robert Robinson CCL No. 515642

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.'

StF 161 – Speak, O Lord, as we come to you

- 1) Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All your purposes, for your glory.
- 2) Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
- 3) Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
And the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty & Stuart Townend

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Sermon

Becoming a leader isn't really that hard. But, what is leadership? 'Leadership is influence. Nothing more, nothing less.' This quote comes from John C. Maxwell, author, speaker, and pastor who has written many books, primarily focusing on leadership. A leader is someone who has the influence to another person(s); to become better or worse person. The larger challenge is becoming what kind of leader? Christian leaders should know our Master's will and care deeply for the welfare of others – point others to see and hear the Master. Christian leadership aims to unite the flocks from different sheepfolds rather than divide them, and is willing to make personal sacrifices for the common good. By doing these, we are seeking to live a way of life like the 'good shepherd' because the great I Am is dwelling in you. ***I Am - so you are.***

Bread - of life (Jn 6:35, 48) - which came down from heaven (Jn 6:41, 51)	Light of the world (Jn 8:12; 9:5)	Door (Jn 10:9) of the sheep (Jn 10:7)	Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11, 14)
Before (Jn 8:58) Abraham was	I AM		
Resurrection and Life (Jn 11:25)	the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6)	Vine (Jn 15:1, 5)	

I am – one of the seven 'I Am' statements in the book of John. All these statements are the deliberate references to the response that Moses received at the burning bush when he asked for God's name. This was the reply, 'I AM WHO I AM' (Ex 3:14). Jesus makes known to us of the kind of leader that he is when he says, "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11, 14). When Jesus declares that he is the good shepherd, he not only identifies himself with God's name, but also with God's care for the people.

In the Old Testament (Ez 34:15-16), it was in their place, God pledged to his people, *'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.'* God identified Himself, *'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep'*. I will be the good shepherd. ***I Am - so are you.***

In the New Testament (John 10:13) Jesus clearly implies that the religious leaders in Jerusalem were not shepherds at all, but rather were like a 'hired hand' who 'does not care for the sheep'. Jesus was teaching His followers, including us today, to follow Him and be the kind of leader like Him, we are to remember our identity in and with Christ. We also must identify ourselves with God's care for the people. ***I Am - so are you.***

'I am the good shepherd....' These words were packed with meaning for those who first heard them. The words of Jesus in today's Gospel are both reassurance and challenge: Reassurance - for those of us who are in need of a caring leader, Jesus is a 'good' shepherd, a genuine leader. Challenge - for those who in need of a caring leader and also are required to care for others; to be a caring shepherd/leader. In John 10:17-18, Jesus explained that the reason Father God loves Him is 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.'* (NRSV) To lay down His life is a commandment from Father God. Jesus has shown us the best way that we can be loved by Father God by willingly to do the command of God: to care and protect those believers in your life.

Good – Greek word 'Kalos' refers to genuine, true, the very nature of leadership. This is Christian leadership which is to serve instead of to be served. Jesus is 'kalos' not only because Jesus has been talking about 'laying down his life' (vs 11 & 15), but His life shows us what 'laying down his life' looks like: A Good Shepherd, Jesus laid down His life for us, sinners. This is Jesus' way of leadership.

This is Jesus' way of demonstrating love:

- It is a voluntary sacrifice which clings to protect and care for the sheep and does not tries to save himself when danger comes.
- It has purpose - two purposes:
 1. To saves the sheep.
 2. God's will be done. Had Jesus not given his life he would not have been able to take it again.

Illustration: a voluntary sacrifice: A willing heart involves more than just a mental consent. It entails purpose and it must also be a commitment to do and perform what the will has proclaimed. Jesus gave us an example of the person who is truly willing.

Matthew 21:28-31(NRSV) The Parable of the Two Sons

A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.

This is like what we often say: 'Action speaks louder than the words'. The willing mind must be present first. God seeks the willing heart. The willing heart will be accepted. If we do something because of some reason or some external pressure and it is not truly our will to do it, then it is unacceptable to God. You cannot have the attitude, 'I don't want to do it but I will, because I must to be saved.' On the other hand, if we say we will and do not perform, this also is unacceptable to God. There must be a voluntary will and also the performance. A person may speak well and give honest speeches, but if there is not a performance of the will, then the will is merely lip service. There must be a performance before there can be any claim.

Reflection: For the mouth of the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 1:19-20), *'If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword'*.

If you force yourself against your own will, God will not accept your sacrifice. There must be a willingness in your will. There is a significant and vital difference in resisting temptation and forcing yourself to do the right thing. The sanctified person, a godly person, a holy person, must resist temptation, but there is no desire in his will to do the thing which he is being tempted to do. The sanctified person, as a mature Christian, hates the evil thing which he is being tempted to do. So, as a mature Christian, if you need someone to hold the pressure on you to do the right thing, then surely you need to be sanctified again, to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You ought to pray and ask God for that second cleansing grace that will purge out your carnal will and give you that burning desire to do the perfect will of God.

Shepherd: This is Jesus' understanding of leadership – a shepherd who would risk his life in behalf of the flock. As Christians – we are called to influence those in our life to be kalos, genuine children of God. Even to the point that we must risk our own life in order to influence other believers' faith to grow deeper and closer to Jesus. Every believer has a leadership role to influence another person; the role of shepherd:

- to protect those around you (physically, emotionally, and spiritually)
- to lead those around you to a better place especially – to a place where God is or to be more aware of God's presence, to be able to see and hear God.

Conclusion: *'Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'* (Matthew 26:41 NRSV)

The great question is this: Are you walking in the Spirit? Or, are you walking in the flesh? If you are walking in the Spirit, you will be consistently successful. If you are walking in the flesh, you will give in to the temptation to please the flesh instead of doing that which would please God.

Prayers of Intercession

With confidence in the Good Shepherd, we turn to our loving Father: The Lord knows each one of his flock by name. Let us offer our prayers to God, trusting in his love for us.

Father God, we pray

For the shepherds of our Church: that they will faithfully help others to find Christ by the witness of their lives, the truth of their words, and the integrity of their actions

For our world: that the presence of Jesus the Good Shepherd may bring healing, peace and joy to all in need, especially those persecuted for their faith.

For a listening heart: that we, who have been called by name, may hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and respond confidently to God's invitations

For all who are discerning a call to ministry: that they will recognize God's invitation, open their hearts to God who loves them, and follow Jesus in laying down their lives for others

For our young people: that they will be open to hear the call of the Good Shepherd to lay down their lives in love and service of God and neighbour.

For all who serve in our hospitals, care homes and in the community: that their generosity and sacrifices may contribute to promoting an ever more loving and caring society

For all who work to restore life and bring healing, for medical personnel, for counsellors, and for chaplains: that God will guide them as they journey with those in pain and preserve them from harm

For our seminarians and all in formation to the priesthood and consecrated life: that they may persevere in lives of generosity and love.

For those who have died: may they be welcomed by the loving embrace of the Good Shepherd Father, hear us and guard the sheep of your flock. Keep us safe in the fold of the Good Shepherd, who welcomes each of us by name. We ask this through the same Christ our Lord. **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 673 – Will you come and follow me

- 1) Will you come and follow Me if I but
call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never
be the same?
Will you let My love be shown?
Will you let My name be known,
Will you let My life be grown in you and
you in Me?
- 2) Will you leave yourself behind if I but
call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never
be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let Me answer prayer in you and
you in Me?
- 3) Will you let the blinded see if I but call
your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never
be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you and you in Me?
- 4) Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but
call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never
be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around,
Through My sight and touch and sound in
you and you in Me?
- 5) Lord, Your summons echoes true when You
but call my name,
Let me turn and follow You and never
be the same.
In Your company I'll go
Where Your love and footsteps show
Thus I'll move and live and grow in You and
You in me.

John L Bell & Graham Maule

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Blessing

Come through the gate of joy and hope, moving into the world that needs to hear the words of peace.
Go in peace to all God's people, bringing good news of Christ's abundant love for them. **Amen**