

26th April 2026 – Morning Service

Rev Andrew Roberts

Prayer of Approach

Good Shepherd, we know your voice and we heed your call to us now to come into your house and gather before you, to receive succour for our souls. **Amen.**

Song – Blessing and honour (Ancient of Days)

- 1) Blessing and honour, glory and power
be unto the Ancient of Days;
from every nation, all of creation
bow before the Ancient of Days.
- Br) Your kingdom shall reign over all the earth:
Sing unto the Ancient of Days.
For none can compare to
your matchless worth:
sing unto the Ancient of Days.
- Ch) *Ev'ry tongue in heaven and earth
shall declare Your glory,
ev'ry knee shall bow at Your throne in worship;
You will be exalted, O God,
and your kingdom shall not pass away,
O Ancient of Days.*

Gary Sadler & Jamie Harvill © 1992 Integrity's Praise! Music

Prayers

Almighty God, in your Son you took on frail flesh
that we might know and understand you better.

God revealed in Christ, we worship and adore you.

Lord Jesus Christ, you humbled yourself to be born
as one of us and called yourself the Good Shepherd.

Jesus, Good Shepherd, we worship and adore you.

Holy Spirit, God sent you to descend upon Jesus as a dove.

Holy Spirit, messenger of God, we worship and adore you.

Amen.

Lord, we confess that we are complacent
about our Christian lives.

When things are going well,

we tend to take you for granted.

We bask in the safety and security we enjoy,
and fail to acknowledge the danger lurking all around.

We fail to heed your voice;

perhaps we have forgotten what you sound like.

You, Lord, are the gateway to life,

who leads us to safe pastures, as long as we heed your voice.

We recommit ourselves to listening for you, Lord,

and living in the abundance of your love.

Knowing you forgive us when we are led astray

and wait to welcome us back.

Good Shepherd, we are humbled by your patience
and endless capacity to forgive. **Amen.**

StF 480 – The Lord's my shepherd

- 1) The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
he makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.
- 2) My soul he doth restore again,
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
e'en for his own name's sake.
- 3) Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me, and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.
- 4) My table thou hast furnishèd
in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.
- 5) Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me,
and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be.

Psalms 23 & The Scottish Psalter

Reading: John 10: 1-10 (NIV)

“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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Song – My life is in your, Lord

My life is in you, Lord,
My strength is in you, Lord,
My hope is in you, Lord,
In you, it's in you.

I will praise you with all of my life;
I will praise you with all of my strength.
With all of my life,
With all of my strength;
All of my hope is in you.

Daniel Gardner © Integrity's Hosanna! Music

Reading: Acts 2: 42-47 (NIV)

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Sermon

Remember David ‘just call me Dave’ Cameron? I recently bought his 744-page memoir for £1 in the bargain basket in Waterstones. It has actually been an interesting read, covering – whatever you make of it – a significant period of recent British history. Amidst all the major issues – which I won’t go into here – there

was an interesting snippet about the Church. During an election campaign David went to speak at the Festival of Life, the biggest Pentecostal event in Britain. There in front of 45,000 people he said this,

‘When I was a child, I had a very specific image of what a church was. I thought, to be a church it had to be an old grey building, with a slate roof and a big spire... that it had to have pews and a pulpit... But I was wrong - and you prove that. You prove that church is people – that church is a family. And it doesn’t matter what the roof is made of. Because with your energy, your devotion, your love of Jesus Christ, you raise that roof every time!’ (p571)

I suspect Mr Cameron is not alone in being wrong about what Church is. His pre-Festival of Life view is probably consistent with what most people think – sadly.

Our bible readings today offer two vivid pictures of what Church is meant to be.

Our Gospel reading features Jesus presenting himself as the Good Shepherd with the Church being the flock or community he cares for.

A typical sheepfold in Jesus’ day was a pen with a rock-built wall that often surrounded the mouth of a cave to provide shelter from inclement weather. Thorny plants grew over the wall to deter wolves and other predators. A gate in the wall provided access to the fold, which could be used by more than one shepherd and his flock. A group of shepherds might hire a gatekeeper to guard the sheep overnight. Sometimes a shepherd lay across the gate to act as a door to the fold. Sheep recognised their shepherd by the sound of his voice or his tuneful whistle. Some shepherds knew their sheep so well that they named them and called them out of the fold to follow them to pasture. So, the parable paints an evocative picture of a shepherd’s care for his flock, in the face of the risks and dangers from predators, thieves and bad weather.

This Gospel provides two interpretations of the parable. Verses 7-10 compare Jesus to the gate of the fold, and verses 11-18 to the shepherd. The gate controls access into and out of the sheepfold, ensuring that the sheep are safe (this seems to be the meaning of ‘saved’ in verse 9) and well fed. So, the gate enables the flock to flourish (v.10). Jesus achieves this by knowing his sheep so well that they are prepared to listen to him and by distinguishing himself from ‘thieves and bandits’, who see the sheep only as commodities rather than living creatures who need nurturing. Jesus rejects their destructive self-interest. Instead, he is utterly other-centred in his care. A shepherd lying across the gate is a gateway to life, who lies down and stands up regularly, a movement that in this Gospel symbolises the flow of heavenly grace in the Word made flesh, who is now close to the Father’s heart.

Shepherding is an image of pastoral care in which ‘knowing’ means healing, sustaining, and keeping safe, and ‘being known’ means feeling confident and secure enough to follow Jesus into the wider world, trusting that he is able to bring out the best in life. This dynamic lies at the heart of the continuing ministry of the risen Jesus, and the well-being of the community – the church -- that follows him.

So here we have a picture of Church that is about people. Rowan Williams once said that ‘Church is what happens when people gather around the risen Jesus’. A statement that is typical of Rowan -succinct and profound at one and the same time. Of course it begs the question of what happens? We will return to this shortly.

There are a couple of other things to note here. At first reading the text appears to be primarily pastoral, centred on the Shepherd’s care for his flock. However, the care of the shepherd is broader and bigger than that. In John 10:16 Jesus says ‘I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also’. So, the picture of Church is both pastoral and missional. Sadly, it is not uncommon in thinking about the nature of the Church to encounter false dichotomies with some arguing for Churches to be pastoral communities

and others arguing no they should be missional. Here both are not just present but important. Within the Methodist tradition that has been an understanding since the days when John Wesley was on his horse that all need to be saved. We are part of a missional Church tradition but one that also takes pastoral care very seriously. Thankfully these false dichotomies are being challenged not least when people realise that one of the best ways of being missional is to offer pastoral care to those who are isolated or vulnerable or in some other form of need.

A second thing to note is how later in John's Gospel we find Jesus passing on to Peter his role of caring for his sheep. In the deeply moving story of Peter's restoration in John 21, Jesus three times charges Peter with caring for or feeding his sheep. Via Peter and the apostles, the Church receives the commission to care for those both inside and outside of the flock – the Church.

So, the second text for today, Acts 2:42-47, what John Stott describes as Luke's delightful cameo portrait of the early Church. Commenting on this passage the great Methodist biblical Scholar CK Barrett said this,

'Luke wished his readers to see what the life of the Christians was like in the apostolic period in order that they might imitate it'.

In other words, here is Luke's picture of what the Church should look like in practice. Meanwhile Barrett's successor as Professor of New Testament at Durham University, the wonderful Scottish Presbyterian and Methodist Local Preacher James Dunn said this about Acts 2:42-47,

'The portrayal may be somewhat idealized... But anyone who is familiar with movements of enthusiastic spiritual renewal will recognise authentic notes: the enthusiasm of the members of the renewal group, with a sense of overflowing joy, desire to come together frequently, eating together and worshipping and including the readiness for unreserved commitment to one another in a shared common life'.

That doesn't sound too unlike what David Cameron experienced at the Festival of Life.

So, here's the question. How does Luke's picture compare to our local Churches today. What might we celebrate as being similar and what might remind us that we need the Holy Spirit's to renew?

As with the Johannine picture of Christian Community in John 10, the Lukan picture in Acts 2 is both pastoral - everyone is together and provided for – and missional, the Church enjoying the goodwill of all the people. The life of Christ is to be lived both within the gathered community of Church and in the scattered community of Church – at home, at work and in the community.

I recently had the joy of spending an hour and twenty minutes in the dentist's chair having a tooth removed and repair work done to the adjacent sinus. What, you may ask, has that got to do with the Church? Well, first of all, the Dentist, Luiz Bruzual is not only a very good (thankfully) dentist – the head dentist at Russell's Hall – but also a devoted Christian, part of the Roman Catholic Church in Stourbridge. This might sound a bit strange but there was a sacramentality about his surgery – where by sacramentality I mean a tangible experience of the grace of God. For not only was the quality of Mr Bruzual's work extremely high so was the way he went about his work – it was very calm, very caring, very courteous – like a shepherd caring for his sheep. Meanwhile, because I am a medical coward and regularly blow-up blood pressure monitors, I had asked former radiographer and much-loved Local Preacher, Mary Grant, to pray for me at the time of my appointment. I've no doubt those prayers meant my BP reading, as I sat awaiting the procedure that morning was perfectly normal and healthy.

So, from our settees at home, to the dentist's surgery and yes, the places where we gather to worship, Church is all about the interaction between the risen Jesus, the promised Holy Spirit and the people of God working together that all may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10).

StF 692 – Your hand, O God, has guided

- 1) Your hand, O God has guided
your flock, from age to age;
the wondrous tale is written,
full clear, on every page;
our forebears owned your goodness,
and we their deeds record;
and both of this bear witness:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.
- 2) Your heralds brought glad tidings
to greatest, as to least;
they summoned all to hasten
and share the great King's feast;
their gospel of redemption,
sin pardoned, right restored,
was all in this enfolded:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.
- 3) Your mercy will not fail us
nor leave Your work undone;
with your right hand to help us,
the victory shall be won;
and then, by all creation,
your name shall be adored,
and this shall be their anthem:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.

Edward Hayes Plumtre

Prayers of Intercession

The Lord is our shepherd, and he meets our needs. So, in quiet we think about:

The young, who need positive role models in this confusing time;
The poor, who need their basic needs to be met and have nowhere to turn;
The sick and ill, who feel desperate and suffer pain, not knowing when or if relief will come;
The lost, whose lives have turned in wrong directions through addiction and poor decisions.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers.**

The Lord takes us to quiet places and restores our souls. So, in quiet we think about:
Our plans and hopes for days out, holidays and times to rest and refresh;
Those who work hard to serve others in our community, and need a break;
Church leaders across the world, that they would speak out words of truth and find rest in you;
Those whose lives are filled with noise and activity, that they will find peace and quiet.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers.**

The Lord guides us on the right path for our lives. So, in quiet we think about:
Those walking paths to safer and secure places to live, free from fear, oppression and persecution;
Those who lead the world, that they will walk towards peace and stop death and war;
Those who are finding faith and hope in you, and are slowly finding the right path;
Those who have taken steps that are hard, and are doubting their own decisions.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers.**

The Lord is with us through the darkest valleys. So, in quiet we think about:
Those who are grieving others who they deeply and painfully miss;
Those in conflict and terror who witness avoidable death every day;
Those moving towards their own imminent end to life, for calm and comfort;

Those in darkness due to abuse and mistreatment by those who should love them.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers.**

The Lord has chosen us as his people, and we are blessed. So, in quiet we think about:
Our role as the people of God in our community, to bring help and hope where it is needed;
The part we can play in challenging unjust rules and laws in our nation;
The help we can offer those from other cultures and faiths who are under attack;
Our responsibility to bless others by giving away some of what God has blessed us with.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers.**

The Lord eases our way through life with his goodness and love. So, in quiet we think about:
Those who love us and those we love, those who are alongside us in all things;
Those who lead us, that they would show honesty, good judgement and care in all things;
Those we struggle with, that God's love would be planted in our hearts;
Us, that at all times we would give thanks for God's goodness.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers. 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 337 – There is a higher throne

1) There is a higher throne
than all this world has known,
where faithful ones from every tongue
will one day come.
Before our God we'll stand,
made faultless through the Lamb;
believing hearts find promised grace:
salvation comes.

2) And there we'll find our home,
our life before the throne;
we'll honour him in perfect song
where we belong.
He'll wipe each tear-stained eye,
as thirst and hunger die;
the Lamb becomes our Shepherd King:
we'll reign with him.

*Ch) Hear heaven's voices sing,
their thunderous anthem rings
through emerald courts and sapphire skies,
their praises rise.
All glory, wisdom, power,
strength, thanks and honour are
to God, our King who reigns on high
for evermore.*

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Song – Go peaceful

- 1) Go peaceful in gentleness
Through the violence of these days.
Give freely, show tenderness
In all your ways.
- 2) Through darkness, in troubled times,
Let holiness be your aim.
Seek wisdom, live faithfulness,
Burn like a flame.
- Ch1) God speed you, God lead you
And keep you wrapped around his heart.
May you be known by love.*
- 3) Be righteous, speak truthfully
In a world of greed and lies.
Show kindness, see everyone
Through heaven's eyes.
- Ch2) God hold you, enfold you
And keep you wrapped around his heart.
May you be known by love.
May you be known by love.*

Paul Field