

30th April 2023 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship - Colossians 1:18

Christ is the head of the body, the Church. He is its origin, the first to return from the dead, so that in all things he might have the supremacy.

StF 455 – All my hope on God is founded

- 1) All my hope on God is founded;
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
Only good and only true.
God unknown, He alone
Calls my heart to be his own.
- 2) Human pride and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray our trust;
What with care and toil we fashion,
Tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.
- 3) God's great goodness aye endureth,
Deep his wisdom passing thought;
Splendour, light, and life attend him,
Beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore, from his store
New-born worlds rise and adore.
- 4) Daily doth the almighty giver
Bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
Pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand, at his hand;
Joy doth wait on his command.
- 5) Still from earth to God eternal
Sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising
For the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call, one and all;
Ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges based on Joachim Neander

Prayers

Our heavenly Father, you welcome us into this place of worship and with gladness we come. Through your Son you have made the way open for all people to know you and experience the blessings of your Kingdom, just by trusting in his righteousness. You feed and nurture us and are everything that we need. In the beauty of the springtime we see evidence of your glory and generosity. In the newness of leaves and blossom we are reminded of your life-giving power, supremely seen when you raised Jesus from death to be glorified for evermore. Sun and rain bring to mind the nurturing, by the Word of Truth, of the gospel-seed sown in our lives, which will bring forth a harvest and multiply blessings.

Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we worship you. **Amen.**

God and Father, you are perfect in power and truth and love, and we desire that our lives are worthy of you, yet we fall short in so many ways, in motivation and word and deed. We disappoint ourselves by the unworthy things that we do and say, and in missed opportunities to bring blessing and encouragement to others. Yet your love for us is never diminished, your grace not reduced. Your forgiveness is always there for us. As we confess our sins and shortcomings we are reminded that we are already forgiven, still loved and always part of your family. We receive this assurance with thanksgiving. **Amen.**

Reading: Psalm 23 (STF 805)

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.

StF 311 – The day of resurrection

- 1) The day of resurrection,
Earth, tell it out abroad!
The passover of gladness,
The passover of God!
From death to life eternal,
From earth unto the sky,
Our Christ has brought us over
With hymns of victory.
- 2) Our hearts be pure from evil,
That we may see aright
The Lord in rays eternal
Of resurrection light;
And, listening to his accents,
May hear, so calm and plain,
His own 'All hail!' and, hearing,
May raise the victor strain.
- 3) Now let the heavens be joyful,
Let earth her song begin,
The round world keep high triumph,
And all that is therein;
Let all things seen and unseen
Their notes of gladness blend,
For Christ the Lord is risen,
Our joy that has no end.

St John of Damascus translated by John Mason Neale

Reading: John 10:1-10

“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.”

StF 481 – The Lord’s my shepherd

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.
- Ch) *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.*
- 3) 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.

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Reading: 1 Peter 2:19-25

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Sermon

I like to walk in the countryside at any time of year, but in the springtime there are particular blessings. The bluebells are now coming out in the woods, fields and on the grass verges. A particular joy for me is seeing the lambs in the fields. I often walk some of the lanes around the village of Blakedown. One particular lane has fields on either side, which often have sheep in them, lambs being present from around April. Last year I was walking in that location, in the lane, with the sheep and lambs in a field separated from me by a fence. I realised that the flock was coming towards me, and as I walked along the lane they were following me, insofar as the field boundary fence would allow them. Whether they followed me through their own curiosity or whether there was some other motivation I didn't know. Some while later I was in that location again, and this time the farmer was in the field with a motor vehicle and a trailer that contained food for the flock, and the sheep and lambs were surrounding him. Perhaps I look a bit like the farmer and that's why the sheep and lambs had followed me on that earlier occasion. Perhaps they thought that I could be a potential provider of food.

Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd. Perhaps it is significant that in the nativity story as described by Luke, it was shepherds that were the first people to visit the newly-born Jesus. Now Jesus describes himself as a shepherd.

King David was a shepherd looking after sheep before he received his call to kingship, yet became anointed by God to take care of a whole nation. This was the calling of all the kings of Israel yet some of them failed at their task. There is a passage in the Biblical prophets (Ezekiel chapter 34) where God sends a prophecy against the rulers (shepherds) of Israel who have not looked after their flock (the people of the nation). They have not looked after the weak and sick and injured of their people, nor gone after the stragglers. They have enriched themselves rather than fed their own people. They have not protected them from intruders. Therefore, in this passage, the Lord is about to remove those rulers and replace them with ones who will truly care for the nation. Here is guidance towards good government! However, it also gives us clues as to what a good shepherd is like.

A good shepherd looks after the flock and feeds the sheep. Jesus fed his people physically with miracles of multiplication (the crowds of 5000 and the 4000 fed with a few loaves and fishes) but also spiritually with his teaching, and he describes himself as the bread of life. Psalm 23 speaks of the Lord as our shepherd, who leads us beside still waters and enables us to rest in green pastures where food is plentiful.

A good shepherd recovers the stragglers. Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep, which has wandered away, but which is sought and found and carried back to safety with the rest of the flock.

A good shepherd protects the flock. David, in his youth spent in pastoral fields with the sheep, personally defended them from wild animals. Jesus protects his people from harm by being their defence from the enemy that tries to come in. He is their door of protection, which keeps the wolf out while allowing the sheep freedom to come and go in safety.

A good shepherd leads his flock. Good rulers of a nation provide leadership for the people to follow to keep them on track. In the same way, Jesus leads his people, from the front! The image is of sheep following the shepherd. Forget for a moment the typical British pastoral scene with the farmer driving the flock of sheep with help from a border collie. In the Middle East, the shepherd would lead the sheep by going in front of them and the sheep would follow where the shepherd went. Jesus says that his sheep know his voice and will follow him, whereas they will not follow a stranger. For any people with a group identity such as a nation, a company or a church fellowship, strong leadership is important. The Bible shows us in many different passages and narratives that when the king of Israel or Judah was righteous and showed strong leadership, the nation would be righteous too and receive God's blessing. In the time of the Judges, however, all people did what was right in their own eyes, which reminds me very much of society today. There is a kind of autonomy but without a sense of absolute truth. This is held up as progressive, but actually is nothing of the kind, as society weakens. Jesus is the ultimate leader who shows us the way of rightness and blessing. He will lead his flock, the Church. Whoever chooses to follow him will receive blessing and security and provision and protection.

A good shepherd wants his flock to flourish. He has come that we may have life in its fullness (John 10:10). He has laid down his life for this very purpose, that we may have life through trusting in him. This is the kind of life that no-one else can offer, life that is fulfilling. People in the world seek meaning and significance and peace through wealth, status and many other means, but do not find it. Only in Jesus is it found, and this through his sheer grace. It cannot be earned. No law or set of rules can bestow it. Jesus gives it as a gift and anyone who wishes can receive it by trust in him, that is acknowledging our own sin and helplessness and relying on Jesus' own righteousness.

Once we had strayed like sheep, but now have turned towards the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). Thanks be to God for our wonderful Saviour. Amen!

StF 470 – Lord for the years

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| 1) Lord, for the years, your love has kept and guided,
Urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
Sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today. | 4) Lord, for our world, when we disown
and doubt Him,
Loveless in strength and comfortless in pain;
Hungry and helpless, lost indeed without Him,
Lord of the world, we pray that
Christ may reign. |
| 2) Lord, for that Word, the Word of life
which fires us,
Speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze.
Teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the Word, receive Your people's praise. | 5) Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne.
Past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone. |
| 3) Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
Spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
For young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer. | |

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Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Father God, we thank you that you have sent your precious Son to be our Saviour and Shepherd. We know that in him we are kept safe now and for evermore. He gives us eternal life and we will be with him for ever. **Amen.**

Lord our God, you have placed us in this world where many people have strayed like lost sheep, but you are seeking the wandering ones. We pray for those who have strayed from your ways. Hear our prayer for nations that need guidance and good governance, especially for those where their leaders oppress the people or seek to enrich themselves while controlling their citizens and keeping them in poverty. We pray for truth to prevail so that all people can live in peace and security, and wars can be brought to an end.

L: Lord, hear us. **R: Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for our own nation, especially in this time of preparation for the crowning of an earthly king. May the eternal truth of the faith be the central part of the ceremony, and may faithfulness to truth be the hallmark of the king's reign, so that power and influence can be exercised in a way that unites the nation and enhances the peace and prosperity of all people on our planet.

L: Lord, hear us. **R: Lord, graciously hear us.**

Hear our prayer for the Government of this land, for the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and all of the Members of Parliament. Grant wisdom and courage to our leaders that they may act in the interests of all people in our nation, being faithful to truth and common sense and supporting freedom of speech and of action, with responsibility. We pray for local government, emergency services, health and social care and education system, and for private and third sector organisations that keep our market shelves stocked and enable us to carry out our lives. As we think about Jesus the Good Shepherd, we pray for our livestock and arable farmers and all who produce our food, that they will be valued and supported by the Government and appreciated by all for what they do.

L: Lord, hear us. **R: Lord, graciously hear us.**

Hear our prayer for your Church in our locality, the nation and globally, for unity and renewal. Guide our Circuit in the way forward that you have determined and grant us courage to follow your way, especially where it means change and new direction.

L: Lord, hear us. **R: Lord, graciously hear us.**

Hear our prayers for people known to us, both within and outside of our congregations, who are in particular need: the suffering, the bereaved, those facing economic problems or without good employment, those facing difficult situations or decisions, people who are seeking fulfilment but not finding it. We pray that all these needs would be met in Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

L: Lord, hear us. **R: Lord, graciously hear us.**

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **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 487 – You shall go out with joy

You shall go out with joy
and be led forth with peace,
And the mountains and the hills
shall break forth before you.

There'll be shouts of joy
And the trees of the field shall clap,
shall clap their hands

And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And you'll go out with joy.

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Blessing

May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of an eternal covenant, make you perfect in all goodness so that you may do his will; and may he create in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. **Amen.**