

## 7<sup>th</sup> September 2025 – Morning Service

### Jesus the Good Shepherd

Olwen Meller

#### Call to Worship

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gave his life for his sheep.

#### StF 137 – New every morning is the love

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| 1) New every morning is the love<br>Our wakening and uprising prove;<br>Through sleep and darkness safely brought,<br>Restored to life, and power, and thought. | 4) Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,<br>As more of heaven in each we see;<br>Some softening gleam of love and prayer<br>Shall dawn on every cross and care. |
| 2) New mercies each returning day<br>Hover around us while we pray;<br>New perils past, new sins forgiven,<br>New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.         | 5) The trivial round, the common task<br>Will furnish all we ought to ask:<br>Room to deny ourselves, a road<br>To bring us daily nearer God.                        |
| 3) If on our daily course our mind<br>Be set to hallow all we find,<br>New treasures still, of countless price,<br>God will provide for sacrifice.              | 6) Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love<br>For perfect rest with you above;<br>And help us, this and every day,<br>To live more nearly as we pray.                    |

*John Keble*

#### Prayer of Adoration

God of creation to you we bring our praise. In your wisdom, before time began, you created all that is. Like a master worker you delight in all that you have made, and your wisdom is still at work in creation, playing among us and calling us to ever deeper knowledge and understanding of your mystery your power and your love.

We see your majesty reflected in the skies, in the mountains, in animals, fish, birds and insects – from the largest whale to the smallest bacteria – all these are gifts from you to keeps alive and thriving. Yet you saw us drift away from you as we selfishly tried to go our own way, therefore, you sent your Son in human form, Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth.

Your glory is above the heavens, and your wisdom is beyond our comprehension, but you are mindful of us, and care for us. Power and glory be to you, Sovereign God!

#### Prayer of Confession

God of all things you have called us to care and protect your wonderful creation, but we have abused our power. Forgive us we pray, our ignorance, greed, and stupidity, which puts your good creation at risk and which divides us from neighbours near and far.

God of wisdom, whose Spirit is at play in the world to draw us more deeply into the love of Christ, enable us by your Spirit, to be better stewards of your creation, loving neighbours to our fellow men, and faithful, Spirit filled, joyful disciples of Jesus. 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.**

## Reading: Psalm 23 (NIV)

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.

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.**

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 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.

*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.*

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.

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.

Stuart Townend © 1996 Thankyou Music

## Reading: John 10: 11-16 & 27-30 (NIV)

'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.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all[a]; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'

## Reflection

Jesus often spoke in rural images that communicated visually to the people he addressed. Although we are not familiar with those images today, they can still say a lot to us; even in our modern, urban, industrialised world.

One such image that Jesus used was that of a shepherd. This was a common image that people in his day saw. Canaan was largely a pastoral region more than an agricultural one, and shepherds were very commonplace. When Jesus says 'Good Shepherd', he is referring to more than merely the skill that the shepherd has – that of being a good shepherd. He was referring to it more in the way that we would refer to a good doctor or a good teacher. The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is one of the loveliest we have of him, and we owe it to Jesus himself because this is how he described himself and his mission.

Jesus is no hireling. The hireling doesn't own the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees the wolf approaching. Jesus is the Good Shepherd; the sheep belong to him and he is ready to die for them.

He made wonderful promises to those who belong to him. Firstly he promised that none of them would ever be lost. No-one would succeed in snatching the sheep from his care – the sheep that the Father has entrusted to him. The sheep that belong to him will be safe with him. Secondly he promised to lead them to the pastures of eternal life.

The feeling of belonging to Jesus and being known and loved by him is a very comforting and reassuring one. He will take care of us in life and in death. He said 'I give them eternal life... they will never be lost'. But the relationship has to be a two-way thing; we have to choose to belong. So, how can we tell that we truly belong to his flock? What does belonging entail? Well, essentially three things:

1. The first and basic requirement is, obviously, to believe in him. We enter the flock by becoming believers, but belief is only the beginning.
2. The second requirement is to listen to him. 'My sheep listen to my voice' is what Jesus says. To listen to his voice and to heed his teachings.
3. And the third requirement is to follow him. 'My sheep follow me' and to follow him is to do his word.

Eastern shepherds raise their sheep for wool rather than for meat, so sheep were with their shepherds for many years and were often known by descriptive names like – say – brown leg or black ear. The shepherds knew each of their sheep – every one of them – and the sheep knew their shepherd's voice. The shepherd knows the uniqueness of each one of his sheep.

Two shepherds had sheltered their flocks in a cave during the night. The next morning, they were faced with the problem of sorting them out. One of the shepherds stood some distance away and gave a peculiar call which his sheep recognised, and soon his whole flock had run to him leaving behind the other shepherd with his sheep. Have you ever been to a function where you didn't know a soul there? Where you felt so alone? So isolated? So distant? Then, all of a sudden, someone from across the room calls your name. You are recognised! You are not alone! You relax because you belong!

The Good Shepherd knows each of his sheep by name. The Indian theologian D T Niles once noticed a young Indian shepherd boy keeping a huge flock of sheep. He stopped and asked, 'How many sheep do you have?'

'I don't know' the boy answered 'I can't count.'

Niles asked him 'How do you know if some of the sheep have wandered off when you get to the place where you are going to camp for the night?'

To his astonishment the boy answered, 'I don't know how many wander off but I know each one by name. I can't count, but each sheep has a name and I know each of their names.'

Shepherds led their animals. They didn't drive them, and they stayed with their flocks day and night protecting them with their rod – a short club type of instrument – and retrieving them from dangerous

situations with their staff – a long pole with a crook in the end that could go round the animal's body and drag it to safety. That is why bishops carry a crook to this day as a sign that they are shepherds of the flock.

God watches and protects his flock. We are his flock! When we cry out, he comes to us. When we look for him, he is there to assist. And when we are in danger, he rescues us. The great thing is that when we stray from him, he seeks us out and calls us back to him. He constantly strives to nourish us and bring us back to the safety of his fold. It is easy to get lost in our world; to run around doing things that must be done, and I must say that I feel very much like that at the moment! There seems to be so much to do and so little time to do it, and it's easy to lose track of where we are and where we should be. It's so easy to be so busy that we get tired out and we find ourselves hungering for a bit of peace, but we don't know where to find it. Maybe it's at times like this that we should just pause – stop and look at where we are and trust in God to see us through. To bring us to the green pastures and still waters that will refresh us, but, as we all know, that is easier said than done!

Maybe our church this morning can be a place of refreshment and relaxation for us. God has led us here today and here is food for our journey – refreshment for the week ahead – whatever it might hold. Sometimes we are made to feel that the whole world is our responsibility. That we must care for the world, be concerned about the environment. That we must be involved in caring for the refugees, and strive to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and bring justice to the poor. We are told what we can do for the world but not what God can do for us. There are many obstacles and dangers in our lives. There are many drains on our energy and many things that challenge us. Alone, we can be overwhelmed by them, but the good news is that we are not alone. There is One who watches over us and gives us the strength and protection that we need.

An old Chinese proverb tells the story of a fox that was captured by a tiger. The fox said 'You can't eat me because the gods have made me leader of all the animals.' The tiger did not believe him but the fox said 'Follow me and see if any animal challenges me.' The tiger agreed to this and followed directly behind the fox as the fox began his walk through the forest. To the tiger's amazement, it turned out to be exactly as the fox had said, not a single animal they encountered challenged the fox. Indeed, every animal they met fled in sheer panic. After several such encounters the tiger finally agreed that the fox was the leader of all the animals and let him go.

So, what does this proverb teach us? It teaches us that it is easy to remove the obstacles that oppose us when we have a tiger behind us.

Psalm 23 tells us that it is God walking with us that overcomes everything that is overwhelming. It is the Good Shepherd who brings comfort to the flock. If the work we do is wearing us down, then we need to turn to God for help. We need to turn to the Good Shepherd.

*Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge –  
take it to the Lord in prayer!*

Joseph Medlicott Scriven

Lovely words from the hymn What a friend we have in Jesus. The shepherd's job is to protect and provide for his sheep and that is what God does for us. Jesus tells us 'The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep' and that God will not allow any of his flock to be snatched away from him.

Let us pray.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads us through life's dark valleys. The valley we most fear is the valley of death, but Jesus, himself, walked through that dark valley, and emerged into the dawn of Easter. He will not abandon us when our time comes. Lord, may your gentle and sure light guide us on the enfolding road, so that we may walk with confidence towards the light that never fades and the life that never ends. **Amen.**

## StF 531 – What a friend we have in Jesus

- 1) What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!
- 2) Have we trials and temptations,  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged:  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness:  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
- 3) Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
Cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge -  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do your friends despise, forsake you?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer;  
In his arms he'll take and shield you,  
You will find a solace there.

*Joseph Melicott Scriven*

## Prayers of Intercession

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who came to seek out and save the lost. Let us pray to him with confidence for our needs.

For leaders in the Church: that they may faithfully watch over the flock of Christ, showing special care for the lost sheep – Let us pray to the Lord. **Have mercy on us, O Lord, in your kindness.**

For our political and civil leaders: that they may show special care for the excluded and the disadvantaged members of society – Let us pray to the Lord. **Have mercy on us, O Lord, in your kindness.**

For parents: that they may create homes where their children know they are loved – Let us pray to the Lord. **Have mercy on us, O Lord, in your kindness.**

For people who have disappeared, and for their grieving families – Let us pray to the Lord. **Have mercy on us, O Lord, in your kindness.**

For those who have lost their way in life: that they may find the right path – Let us pray to the Lord. **Have mercy on us, O Lord, in your kindness.**

For all gathered here: that we may realise that each of us is important and precious to God – Let us pray to the Lord. **Have mercy on us, O Lord, in your kindness.**

For our deceased relatives and friends: that they may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever – Let us pray to the Lord. **Have mercy on us, O Lord, in your kindness.**

For our own special needs and the needs of those known to us – Let us pray to the Lord. **Have mercy on us, O Lord, in your kindness.**

God of compassion, grant that we may never doubt the love of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and help us share with others the love we have received from Him. We ask this through the same Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## Reflection

It's not only sheep and coins that get lost – people get lost too. It is said that about 250,000 people disappear in Britain every year, from children to the elderly, for every sort of reason, leaving behind incredulous families who live in a mixture of hope and despair, unable to accept what has happened or to grieve as they would over a death. A [National Missing Persons Line](#) was set up in Britain in 1992 and is open 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. It is one of the fastest growing charities in Britain.

Why do they go missing? Some run away from unhappy homes. Some are abducted by a separated parent. Some are victims of violent crime. Most countries have no accurate record of the number of children that go missing each year. Most police forces don't act upon a report that a child is missing for at least 24 hours. Many countries have sophisticated programmes for tracking down stolen cars and credit cards but not for missing children.

People can get lost in so many ways. People addicted to alcohol or drugs. People who can't hold down a job or finish a course of studies. People who are unable to maintain a stable relationship. All of these can be said to be lost, and it is extremely difficult to find them. What makes it so frustrating is that they are not usually far away. They are lost in our midst – lost, even within the bosom of the family. Yet, no-one seems to be able to reach them. In these cases, the task of the shepherd is not so much to find them as to help them find themselves.

Jesus shows his concern for the 'lost sheep'. A shepherd doesn't wait for the lost sheep to come back. He goes looking for it. As it is with Jesus. He is the messenger sent to us by the Father. He didn't wait for sinners to come looking for him. He went out of his way to look for them, and when he found them, he escorted them back to the Father's house with joy. To repent is to come back to God – and to come back to God is to come home.

## StF 323 – I will sing the wondrous story

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| 1) I will sing the wondrous story<br>Of the Christ who died for me,<br>How he left the realms of glory<br>For the cross on Calvary:                    | 3) Faint was I, and fears possessed me,<br>Bruised was I from many a fall;<br>Hope was gone, and shame distressed me;<br>But his love has pardoned all: |
| <i>Ch) Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story<br/>Of the Christ who died for me,<br/>Sing it with his saints in glory,<br/>Gathered by the crystal sea.</i> | 4) Days of darkness still come o'er me;<br>Sorrow's paths I often tread;<br>But the Saviour still is with me,<br>By his hand I'm safely led:            |
| 2) I was lost; but Jesus found me,<br>Found the sheep that went astray,<br>Raised me up, and gently led me<br>Back into the narrow way:                | 5) He will keep me till the river<br>Rolls its waters at my feet;<br>Then he'll bear me safely over,<br>Where the loved ones I shall meet:              |

Francis Harold Rowley © Harper Collins Religious

## Blessing

Lord Jesus, you are the shepherd of the sheep. You are the way – help us to follow it. You are the truth – help us to believe it. You are the life – help us to live it. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all now and for evermore. **Amen.**