

Traditional Home service

Sunday 25th April

OPENING PRAYER

Risen Christ, faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep:
teach us to hear your voice and to follow your command, that all your people may be gathered into one flock, to the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Let us return to the Lord our God and say to him:

Father,
we have sinned against heaven and against you.
We are not worthy to be called your children.
We turn to you again.
Have mercy on us,
bring us back to yourself
as those who once were dead
but now have life through Christ our Lord.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*The Lord's my shepherd*)

READINGS - Acts 4.5-12
1 John 3.16-24
John 10.11-18

TALK

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.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (*At the name of Jesus*)

CONCLUSION

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection, and give us grace to follow in his steps; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

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 in death's dark vale, yet will I fear none ill, for thou art with me and thy rod and staff me comfort still.

4 My table thou hast furnished 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 forevermore my dwelling place shall be.

1 At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue confess him King of glory now; this the Father's pleasure, that we call him Lord, who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

2 Humbled for a season, to receive a name from the lips of sinners unto whom he came; faithfully he bore it spotless to the last, brought it back victorious when from death he passed.

3 Bore it up triumphant with its human light, through all ranks of creatures to the central height; to the eternal Godhead, to the Father's throne, filled it with the glory of his triumph won.

4 Name him, Christians, name him, with love strong as death, but with awe and wonder, and with bated breath; he is God the Saviour, he is Christ the Lord, ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored.

5 In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue all that is not holy, all that is not true; crown him as your captain in temptation's hour, let his will enfold you with its light and power

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The most important question that we each have to answer for ourselves is: "who is Jesus?" If your answer is that He is simply an irrelevance or an historical figure then you won't want to answer a secondary question which is: what is my relationship to Jesus?

I believe that our answers to these two questions are fundamental to the way we live life on earth and what happens to us beyond this life. If Jesus is who He says He is and did and said what the Bible says that He did and said then what we do about that information is critical.

In today's passage from John's gospel that Linda read for us Jesus says twice that "I am the good Shepherd." The Jews listening to Him knew exactly what He was saying because of all the ways that God is pictured in the old and new Testament by far the most popular is that of a Shepherd. In the old Testament there are seven different names for God and one of them is God our Shepherd – the one who leads His people, the way that God led them out of Egypt, through the desert and into the promised land.

There were a lot of shepherds in the old Testament but the most famous of these was David, the Shepherd boy who killed Goliath and then went on to Israel's most famous king. God chose David to be king over Israel because of his shepherding skills which, according to David, included killing lions and bears that had attempted to steal some of his father's sheep. David is a symbol of hope for us all because despite his flawed character and his many sins the Bible describes him as a man after God's own heart. You see David wasn't just a Shepherd who became a king he was also God's greatest worshipper. Not only did he write most of the Psalms – the hymnbook of the old Testament – he meditated on God's word and put it into practice. He didn't only talk about worshipping God he was exuberant in his praise and worship and even as king he danced in the streets with abandon when the Ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem.

Secret to David's heart for God is contained in his most famous Psalm. Although he was a Shepherd he recognised that he was also a sheep and that the Lord was his Shepherd. Knowing how stupid sheep are and how much the Shepherd had to do for the sheep that relied upon him David had a clear understanding of just how dependent he was on God. David's arms showed how much he depended upon his personal relationship with his God.

In Jesus day the Pharisees were seen as the shepherds of Israel but in the teaching Jesus gives us in John chapter 10 Jesus refers to them as thieves and robbers who didn't really care for the sheep and would abandon them at the first sign of trouble. By declaring that He was the good Shepherd Jesus was identifying himself yet again with God. He was the one who was now going to lead His sheep and that His flock included sheep that were not of Israel.

Like the shepherds of His day Jesus' voice would be known by His sheep and they would follow Him by still waters, green pastures and on into eternal life. David the shepherd boy had put his trust in God when faced with predators and although he risked his life to protect the sheep his expectation was that he would kill the lion and the bear and not the other way around. It was this expectation which led him down into the valley to face Goliath, the Philistine's champion warrior, armed with only a staff sling and a few pebbles.

In Jesus case He makes it clear that in His defence of the sheep He would have to lay down His life. Because we are the sheep that God had put into Jesus care Jesus knew that He would have to destroy the power of sin and death that Satan had imposed upon the world since the fall of Adam if He was going to save us and the only way to do that was to voluntarily lay down His perfect, sinless life in exchange for our imperfect sinful lives.

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus' sacrifice hundreds of years earlier when he said *"Isaiah 53:2-6 He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a*

man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Many years later St Peter wrote to the church with this passage from Isaiah in mind:

1Pe 2:22-25 "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."

Before the death and resurrection of Jesus Isaiah said that we all, like sheep have gone astray and each of us has turned to our own way. After Jesus death and resurrection Peter wrote we were like sheep going astray but now we have returned to the Shepherd and overseer of our souls.

In today's passage Jesus made it clear that although it was the Father's plan that He sacrificed His life for us, His sheep, no one could take it from Him and that He gave up His life voluntarily knowing that He could take it back again when He wanted. Jesus knew exactly what He had to face in order to save His sheep. He had to become one of us. He had to become the sacrificial lamb that takes away the sin of the world.

Isaiah 53:7 says: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

1 John 3:16 says "this is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.

And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."

I've already alluded to how stupid sheep can be and that in referring to us as sheep the Bible is not being complimentary. Having said that, however, the sheep do have one thing going for them – they recognise the voice of the Shepherd and follow Him.

If we read the Bible with serious intent we too can hear the voice of the Shepherd and follow him.

When I was a boy I memorised the 23rd Psalm in the King James version and although I have read over 30 different translations of David's poem since then it is the King James version that sticks in my mind.

It was one of my mum's favourite passages from the Bible and I was thankful that because of God's goodness and mercy I was able to repeat it to her several times whilst I held her hand in the hospital as she took her own walk through the valley of the shadow in order to find her permanent dwelling place in the house of the Lord.

The Lord Is My Shepherd

Psa 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Psa 23:2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Psa 23:3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Psa 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Psa 23:5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Psa 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.