

Sunday Service for 3rd May 2020 Revd Pauline Crispin

We come to be loved. We come to receive peace. We come, and find life.

Psalm 23

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd, **I shall not want.**
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; **he leads me beside still waters ;**
- 3 he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
- 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil ;
for you are with m; your rod and your staff — they comfort me.
- 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies ;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- 6 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.

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We come to you, O God, in penitence for what we have done.

We come to you in anticipation for what you offer to us.

We come to you in hope, for we know you will give us abundant life. **Amen.**

Read of Sing

- 1 The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never ;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.
- 2 Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.
- 3 Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me.
- 4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me ;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.
- 5 Thou spread'st a table in my sight ;
thy unction grace bestoweth ;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth !
- 6 And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never :
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.

We praise you, Lord, for being the voice of peace when we are angry,
for being the voice of hope when we are afraid,
for being the voice of love when we feel rejected,
and for being the voice we can always trust
at every stage of our life. **Amen.**

1 Peter 2:19-25 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

John 10:1-10 'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Thought for this week

It is easy to link these verses from John's Gospel with verses 11-18 from the same chapter. The second parable is also about sheep, and it is much clearer and more vivid, beginning as it does with Jesus's statement,

'I am the good shepherd'. But the parable we have today is more puzzling, and requires careful study in its own right.

Picture a group of sheep. They are safe in their pen, which they know well, and they are keeping an eye on the only way in and out - the gate. A mixture of people has been coming to the pen, but not via the gate, and the sheep are all a little wary. They like it best when the shepherd comes. They know the shepherd, and he knows each one of them. He takes them out to places where they can get good pasture and feed safely. When he comes to the gate, they can relax their watchfulness and just get on with eating, knowing that the shepherd will take care of them.

But when other people come to the gate, the sheep are in a dilemma. Their instinct is to go out when the gate is open, because that is what they have always done. But they remember times when someone who wasn't the shepherd came and led them out, and they couldn't find the pasture, they didn't recognize his whistle, and some of them got lost. Ewes remember being separated from their lambs, and they all remember that the flock that made it home was smaller, less secure, and when they huddled together at night, they were not so warm and cosy.

Some of the sheep want to stay where they are and so they don't want to go out of the gate at all. That way, they know that they will be safe. But the other sheep point out that they will also starve to death if they don't go out to pasture. Poor bewildered sheep.

Clearly, this parable is at least partly a riddle. The writer of the Gospel tells us that its first hearers didn't understand it, and that Jesus had to explain that the point of the parable is not the shepherd, but the gate. A closed gate functions to keep the sheep safely shut in, but the open gate is what this story is primarily interested in. It is the open gate that allows the shepherd to come in and it is the open gate that leads to the life-giving pastures. There will always be strangers who confuse us and the thieves who come to kill and rob; which reminds us that we are always at risk. We, like the sheep, have to learn to value something more than the safety of the pen. That something is what Jesus is offering us. The climax of the story is not about security, it is about abundant life.

What God gives us in Christ is the certainty that we are forgiven people, free to come and go in God's great pasture. For us sheep that is sometimes rather more than we might want. We might prefer a small mouthful of grass and then a quick scurry back into our reassuringly dull sheepfold. But that is too small a gift for God to offer.

So to 'return to the shepherd and guardian of your souls' is to step through the gateway of Christ's cross into an entirely new world, where we are no longer sheep, easily satisfied with small securities, but children of God, free to come and go in God's world.

With that freedom comes responsibility, and a willingness to abandon our day-to-day security, as Jesus did, in order to gain the total security of being and doing what we are made for.

Loving God, we pray for those whose lives are empty; for all who feel alone and unloved; for those whose lives lack purpose. Lord of love, **bring them abundant life.**

We pray for those whose lives are filled with anger and bitterness; for those who cannot let go of the past, and so have no present or future. Lord of love, **bring them abundant life.**

We pray for those whose lives are filled with anguish and pain; for those who suffer depression; for those who are afraid to go out and for those who cannot go out; for those who cannot see a way forward. Lord of love, **bring them abundant life.**

Loving God, may your abundant life fill our world, our church and ourselves, in the name of Jesus. **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.**

Lord, in these uncertain times of the lockdown, as I wake and rise, may I know your presence as the gatekeeper of my day, so that fears may be quelled, energy maintained and time blessed. Then as the hours pass and my thoughts turn to the night, may my body find rest, my mind find peace, and may sleep restore and refresh me, as you, Lord, become the gatekeeper of my night. I ask this in your name. Amen.

Read or Sing

1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee ;

thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not ;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be :

*Great is thy faithfulness ! Great is thy faithfulness !
Morning by morning new mercies I see ;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

- 2 Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love :
- 3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide ;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside !

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960)

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**When this or that gate seems closed to me,
show me your open gate and the way I should take. Amen.**

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. **Amen**

Once again this comes with my thoughts and prayers for you, holding you in prayer by name.

Although we are not meeting together we are joined in fellowship, as the Body of Christ.



Pauline