

## **WORSHIP 25TH APRIL 2021 EASTER 4**

### **WELCOME & OPENING PRAYER**

O God of peace, whose Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, was brought back from the dead to be the great Shepherd, grant that we may be led by him out of darkness and death into the fullness of life eternal; through the same Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, in all eternity. **Amen**

### **HYMN: 10,000 REASONS**

### **READINGS BY JACKIE COLLINS**

#### **Acts 4:5-12 NIV**

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

#### **JOHN 10: 11-18 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 sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

### **REFLECTION:**

I am sure we have all come across the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. There are all those stained glass windows of Jesus standing with a sheep over his shoulder.

Comforting images, but to an urban population I would suggest some of the depths of this metaphor are missed.

Now I have lived in deepest Cumbria for many years surrounded by both sheep and farmers. I can tell you that modern Shepherds love and care for their sheep in a very deep and practical way. Farming families know their sheep, often hand raising many, giving them pet names and rarely taking holidays because there is no-one they trust to look after their flock properly. It is also a twenty-four seven occupation. Sheep give birth in the early hours and the shepherds are there. The high fells sheep need bringing to lower ground for protection from the elements and they all need feed delivered on a daily basis.

As you walk through fields of sheep they move away nervously unless you are the farmer to whom they rush bleating and hungry!

Sheep are quite nervous herd animals, feeling safe in the herd, sticking together, but it seems the presence of the Shepherd gives the sheep courage, because they feel safe.

In the world of Jesus, the Shepherds were outsiders, considered unclean. There was, and still is, little status in being a Shepherd, and yet Jesus chose the humble Shepherd as an image for the loving care he wants to give to his flock. Even today it is rarely the Kings, politicians and business magnets who care for the ordinary everyday people. It is the low paid care workers, charity volunteers, NHS workers and the like who give that 24/7 care to ordinary everyday people.

In the time of Jesus Shepherds led their sheep from the front- leading them to water, safety, food, quiet places to rest. So confident were the sheep, even though sheep are by nature nervous and stubborn, they happily followed their shepherd- because they knew his voice!

Over this pandemic we have been herded into our isolation pens and now nervously face going out into the world again- and like the sheep many of us may feel both nervous and excited.

So, I would encourage us to take this image of Jesus as our Good Shepherd to heart. We are known by name, our individual personalities and foibles are known, our needs are taken care of, our Shepherd has laid down his life to be available to care for us in every possible way we need. We need have no fear, whatever we face, when our Good Shepherd is close, which he always is, and we will recognise His voice just as he recognises ours.

Let us also remember that Jesus wants to give this 24/7 love and care to all for as he says, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd". **Amen**

## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESION BY NINA LLOYD-HIRST**

**The response for today's prayers is: Guide us and lead us**

**Good Shepherd: Guide us and lead us**

Heavenly Father, thank you for the church, for its teaching and fellowship,

For the breaking of the bread together and for prayer, for new ways of being 'Church'.  
We pray that we may always come before you with reverence and awe.  
Thank you for our leaders and for all who work in any way here at St. John's.  
Thank you for faithful stewardship, for all who care and share.  
Give us glad and generous hearts to use our possessions aright,  
to share our time, our gifts and our talents  
to seek out and rescue the lost and the straying,  
protect the young, and uplift any who are fallen.  
We pray for those who are persecuted for their faith.

**Good Shepherd: Guide us and lead us**

Heavenly Father, we pray for all who walk in darkness  
and in the valley of the shadow of death.  
We remember all who are caught up in strife and warfare,  
all political prisoners, refugees and stateless persons.  
We pray for the leaders of our world.

**Good Shepherd: Guide us and lead us**

Heavenly Father, we remember before you those whose lives are restricted  
by disability, by inequality of opportunity or by prejudice.  
We remember all those who are sick and those who care for them.  
May the light of your healing love shine on them,  
bringing them wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

**Good Shepherd: Guide us and lead us**

Glory to you, living Lord Jesus Christ,  
you have triumphed over the powers of darkness  
and brought us to share in the inheritance of your saints in light.  
You have opened the gate of glory and raise us to newness of life.  
We pray for those who mourn.  
Thank you for the lives of those who now know life in all its fulness,  
may we follow their example and serve you, risen Lord,  
who with the Father and the Holy Spirit  
are one God, world without end. **Amen.**

**Good Shepherd: Guide us and lead us**

**HYMN: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD**

**THE PEACE & BLESSING**

Abide in him as he abides in you: let his peace fill you and surround you. The peace of the Lord be always with you;

**and also with you.**

The Mighty Father protect you and enfold you. The Good Shepherd guide you and revive you. The Holy Spirit strengthen you and abide in you. And the blessing of God the Father, Jesus our Good Shepherd, and the Holy Spirit be with you and all whom you love. **Amen.**