



Fourth Sunday of Easter
Morning Prayer
'New Perspectives'



*You are invited to guard time for us to be together, united in prayer in one faith,
to our one Lord. Dispersed community prayer at 10:30am.*

You may wish to prepare by lighting a candle

◆ denotes an optional pause to keep silence and meditate on the words

🔊 Denotes optional audio / video version from the church website:

<https://widcombe.church/our-churches/church-life/church-online/>

Preparation

O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

In your resurrection, O Christ,
let heaven and earth rejoice. Alleluia.

Blessed are you, Lord God of our salvation,
to you be praise and glory for ever.
As once you ransomed your people from Egypt
and led them to freedom in the promised land,
so now you have delivered us from the dominion of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your risen Son.
May we, the first fruits of your new creation,
rejoice in this new day you have made,
and praise you for your mighty acts.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

Easter Anthems

1 Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us: ◆
so let us celebrate the feast,
2 not with the old leaven of corruption and wickedness: ◆
but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians 5.7b, 8

3 Christ once raised from the dead dies no more: ◆
death has no more dominion over him.
4 In dying he died to sin once for all: ◆
in living he lives to God.
5 See yourselves therefore as dead to sin: ◆
and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6.9–11

6 Christ has been raised from the dead: ♦
the first fruits of those who sleep.
7 For as by man came death: ♦
by man has come also the resurrection of the dead;
8 for as in Adam all die: ♦
even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15.20–22

*Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.*

Opening prayer

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

♦

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

The Apostles' 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.

Hymn

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.

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.

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.

My table thou hast furnished
in presence of my foes.
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me,
and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be.



The Word of God

Old Testament reading: Psalm 23

¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴ 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.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ 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.

Gospel reading: John 10:11-18

¹¹ 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² 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. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ 'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. ¹⁸ 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 from Miles Andrews

Last year I went on an adventure with my family. We went walking in the Cambrian mountains in Wales, it's a beautiful part of the world, and we were walking along this ancient pilgrimage route. It's a walk that my dad had planned and he'd promised us beforehand that there was a proper path. Except when we got there we realised that this path was a bog, it was quite literally underwater. We were well equipped with walking boots but it would probably have been more useful for us to have been equipped with snorkels. Also it was raining.

Despite all that, we decided to carry on with this walk which actually ended with my fiancée Issy, literally falling into this bog and losing one of her walking boots in the process. You can imagine how unhappy we were with my dad and the promises he'd made to us about this walk.

It hurts to be lied to doesn't it? It hurts to have promises broken. It hurts when we've been assured of a certain outcome and we find the reality is so different to what we were told. It hurts to be led astray.

Today's two readings talk a lot about this idea of a shepherd. It's a word that is often used in the bible to describe someone who watches over others, protects others and guides others. In John 10, Jesus is speaking to a people who were no stranger to being led astray by bad shepherds. This is a people being led by pharisees - these cruel shepherds who look to exploit their sheep rather than love them. Who look to put the needs of themselves above the needs of their followers. But what Jesus says about himself couldn't be more different.

Jesus says that he is "the good shepherd" and he mentions these two characteristics that radically separate him from the cruel shepherdship of the pharisees.

Firstly, Jesus says the good shepherd is a sacrificial shepherd. Jesus says the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Where the pharisees are interested in what they can get from the people, Jesus is interested in what he can do for them. This is a shepherd who gives away his own life so that his sheep might live. This is the son of God, the creator of the universe who came down from his heavenly throne to die for us, to suffer death and shame in our place. It's a shepherdship that gives more than it takes.

Secondly the good shepherd is a personal shepherd. Jesus says the good shepherd knows his sheep. In fact, earlier in the chapter it says the good shepherd knows his sheep by name. Where the pharisees' relationship with the people would have been superficial at best, Jesus instead seeks a deep, personal relationship with his followers.

In fact, he doubles down on this promise. Look at verse 16: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also." It's a small detail but I can't help but focus on that last sentence; "I must bring them also." It implies going out to find those sheep and bring them back to him. One fold, one shepherd - no one is left out of Jesus' fold.

Jesus is so committed to this desire to have a relationship with us that he will go and seek us out even when we are not seeking him. And I think this is true whatever stage you're at. He loves you so much that he will continue to search for you until he has your entire heart. Not just 50%, not just 75%, not even 99%. Jesus will search for you until 100% of your heart is his. That's how much he desires you.

Jesus is the shepherd who makes us his sheep. That's right you, me, we're all sheep. Even if you're not Welsh! I personally think I'm fulfilling the sheep look pretty well today with my lockdown hairdo.

So if we are his sheep how do we respond to Jesus the shepherd? I think the answer to that lies in understanding where our perspective is. Or more specifically is our focus on the shepherd or on the storm?

Like so many others I have been shaken by this pandemic. And I confess that in these times my eyes have been focussed on the coronavirus more than they have been focussed on Jesus. Even to the point of often finding myself paralysed by this fear of death that I can't explain.

When the storm is raging around us, it can be so easy to be consumed by these feelings of hopelessness and worry.

When I reflect on that I'm reminded of the disciples when they're in the boat with Jesus and this storm whips up, and they say to Jesus "what are you doing, don't you care if we drown?" Perhaps when we are struggling we have a tendency to ask God the same thing, "God, what are you doing? Don't you care?" God is gracious to us when our eyes slip from him. Jesus does graciously calm the storm in that story. But after doing so he asks them this really gentle question "why are you so afraid?"

Perhaps Jesus is asking you that same question today. "Why are you so afraid?"

Psalm 23 says "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me." For the writer of this psalm, the fact that God is with them is of far more comfort than anything else God could do for them. I know that, like the disciples in the boat, often my first response is to come to God asking him to solve a problem. But how often when I have a problem do I approach God, seeking only his presence?

I think that the promise that God is with us is so much more comforting and carries so much more weight than just a casual reassurance of "don't worry everything is going to turn out okay in the end." God doesn't promise that everything in our lives will turn out exactly how we want it to, but he does promise to be beside us every step of the way.

When we trust in Jesus as shepherd, we stop seeing him as this distant God who we need to convince to be nice to us and we begin to trust him to walk us through the storms without panicking, without feeling like we have to take control of the situation ourselves and without feeling like we have to hurry him into doing something to solve it. When we trust in Jesus as shepherd all we really need to do is seek his presence.

I love the way that verse 16 in Psalm 23 articulates the writer's hunger for that presence. "I will dwell in the house of the lord all the days of my life" or as it says in the message, "I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life." Being in God's presence is home, it's where we belong. So let's choose to rest in that presence afresh today, being led through the storm by a God who will not let us go.

Amen.

Intercessions led by Jill Oldham

God's people are called to be united in the fellowship of the Spirit, sharing God's life. Fellow members of the Body of Christ, let us pray to our heavenly Father.

Father, we commend to your love all ministers of your Word and sacrament, remembering especially here in Widcombe Tim, Jenny, Judith, Sarah and Mary. Keep them true to their calling, so that through their life and work, many may come to know you.

Lord in your mercy *hear our prayer.*

Father, we commend to your wisdom all those in positions of power throughout the world. Help them to encourage friendship, rather than show aggression; achieve reconciliation, rather than seek revenge; and work to the common good of all mankind in your name.

Lord in your mercy *hear our prayer.*

Father, we commend to your healing all victims of war, terrorist attacks, natural disasters or oppression. In particular, we pray for the peoples of Myanmar, Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria; also for the families of victims of gun violence in the USA – 11,000 people killed in the first three months of this year.

Lord in your mercy *hear our prayer.*

Father, we commend to your peace and joy all the people of this parish and beyond: for those who accept political and social responsibility; for those who teach in our schools; for those who work in our hospitals; for those who serve in voluntary organizations caring for old people, disabled people, children and young people, or the needs of minority groups; and for those who maintain law and make it possible for us to live our lives in a framework of order.

Lord in your mercy *hear our prayer.*

Father, we commend to your healing all who have chronic pain, those recovering from surgery, those afflicted by long Covid, and the many who depend on others for life and movement. We also remember all who are grieving for the loss of a loved one and in a moment of quiet, we think of our own Queen Elizabeth and her family, as well as others known to us who are in need of our prayerful support.

Lord in your mercy *hear our prayer.*

Rejoicing in your strength, love and fellowship, Father, we offer you our thanks and praise.

Merciful Father, *accept our prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Amen

◆

Hymn 

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.

*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.*

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.

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

The Collect

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.

Lord's Prayer

Standing at the foot of the cross, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

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.



To Conclude

May the risen Christ grant us the joys of eternal life.
Amen.

Let us bless the Lord. Alleluia, alleluia.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.

