

ST ANDREWS UNITNG CHURCH GLENBROOK

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN EASTER

WE BEGIN - It's now the fourth Sunday in the season of Easter, and can you believe that this is our seventh Sunday of worship online and at home!

I'm immensely proud of how well we have adapted to this monumental change in our lives. Many of you are sharing in our online worship and Zoom morning teas, and others are enjoy taking their time to reflect deeply on the word of God. I've also heard beautiful stories of members sharing in uniquely intimate worship with loved ones with our at home resources. Each of us in our own ways, are finding ways to connect with God and with each other.

Let me just say that I miss you all terribly and I look forward to the happy day when we can embrace one another again. However let's continue to learn and grow from this unexpected season of change in our church's life.

For example, we have already learnt that we don't actually need a building to worship - but we do need intentional connection and encouragement to be the Body of Christ. We have learnt that it's much easier for our friends and family to join in with our online worship, than to walk through the doors of the church. One of the questions I've been pondering is, when this period of physically distancing is over, how will this season of adaption and innovation have changed us? Did you know that many people beyond our St Andrews congregation are choosing to tune into our online worship? How might we continue to provide a place of connection and spiritual nourishment in their lives?

Over this Easter season, the season of new, unexpected life - let me encourage us all to listen for the promptings of the Spirit, inviting us to explore new pathways and unknown territories in our worship, witness and service.



WE LIGHT A CANDLE - The Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name.
Listen, for our shepherd is calling.

WE PRAY - Shepherding God,
As you sit at the gate, Lord, what are you thinking?
Are you wondering...who will care for the lost sheep, that they might find their way back to you?
As you sit at the gate, Lord, does your patience get tested?
Are you wondering...when are we are going to turn up, tails between our legs?
As you sit by the gate, Lord, what do you see when you search the horizon?
Are you wondering...who might be the next sheep to be tempted away?
As you sit by the gate, Lord, we are so grateful for the welcome we will receive as we saunter our way back to you, knowing that you, our Shepherd, always wait for us. Amen.

WE SING - TiS10, 'The Lord's is my shepherd'
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,
ev'n for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no 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.

*Scottish Psalter
1650*

WE LISTEN - PSALM 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.
 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
 I fear no evil;
 for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff—
 they comfort me.
 You prepare a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies;
 you anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.
 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.

WE PRAY - God, our creator,
 we come to this place of green pastures and still waters,
 some of us know the way here— it is part of our routine, a natural path of life,
 others need some guidance, encouragement and help.

Jesus, our shepherd,
 we come to this place of green pastures and still waters,
 knowing that we will find you here, and that you will guard the gate for us.
 We come to this place of safety and welcome ready to be fed and watered by
 our Shepherd King.

Holy Spirit, our inspiration,
 we come to this place of green pastures and still waters,
 ready for you to do your thing.
 To enliven us with your love, breathe life into our tired souls, reinvigorate our
 purpose and send us on our way.

Forgive us for those times when we have failed to find our way to you and instead
 have gone our own way, and walked away from the flock.

Forgive us for those times when we have ignored the shepherd's call and instead
 behaved in ways that separate us from others.

Lord Jesus,
 we know that you are the shepherd of our lives, always looking out for us, offering
 protection from a world that can be a scary place.
 Thank you for never giving up on your restless flock.
 Shepherd of our lives,
 hear our prayer.
 Amen.

WE PLAY - EILIDH AND ELLIE COUNT SHEEP

Eilidh: Hey, Ellie, do you ever count sheep?

Ellie: Do, I ever count sheep? When would I count sheep, I live in the town, and you don't see many sheep strolling down Katoomba Street!

Eilidh: No, I don't mean actually counting sheep. I mean count sheep in your head?

Ellie: Eilidh, what's all this sheep counting about ?

Eilidh: Jesus was interested in sheep.

Ellie: Jesus was interested in sheep.

Eilidh: Yes, he was. He told lots of stories about sheep.

Ellie: He probably liked a lamb kebab as well, but he never told stories about that?

Eilidh: Eh...well...ehm... Can we start again?

Ellie: Sorry - Sounds like a good idea.

Eilidh: Are you ready?

Ellie: Yep, ready when you are!

Eilidh: Do you ever count sheep?

Ellie: (ARGGH! face-plant)

Eilidh: Seriously, Ellie, I mean count sheep in order to get to sleep at night, it's supposed to relax you, and send you off to sleep.

Ellie: No not really, these days I'm either fast a sleep by 8pm or awake awake reading till 2am, but not counting sheep.

Eilidh: Oh right!

Ellie: Eilidh, I kind of get the feeling that there is more to this conversation than counting sheep. Would I be right in saying that?

Eilidh: Yes, Ellie, you would be right.

Ellie: Go on, out with it, what is troubling you?

Eilidh: Why was Jesus counting sheep then?

- Ellie: Why was Jesus counting sheep? Really! When was Jesus counting sheep?
- Eilidh: Well, there was that story where one of the sheep got lost and he went out looking for them and he counted 99 and must have fallen asleep!
- Ellie: Umm... wait a minute - what?
- Eilidh: Well, he went out and searched for the sheep, putting the rest in the pen, and somehow managed to be out searching for the sheep and acting as a gate at the same time. So I reckoned Jesus must have fallen asleep when he counted to 99 and woke up at the pen, and the other sheep was back again.
- Ellie: Eilidh, I think you are getting your stories mixed up. There are lots of stories about Jesus being the shepherd and that we are the sheep in the bible. You are talking about the Parable of the Lost Sheep, and then you are talking about Jesus using another metaphor in John chapter 10.
- Eilidh: So Jesus is a shepherd and a gate and a loaf of bread?
- Ellie: Metaphorically speaking, yes, he is.
- Eilidh: What is a metaphorically-thingy?
- Ellie: A metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable"!
- Eilidh: Say what?
- Ellie: It means using objects as word pictures to describe something. So, Jesus is a good shepherd, better than any other shepherd. Jesus is the gate, that lets people come and go freely, Jesus is the bread of life that sustains people. All these metaphors help us to understand Jesus better, tell us a little bit more about who he is and what he does for us.
- Eilidh: Ah right! So, Jesus was not really a shepherd?
- Ellie: No, he was a carpenter and of course the Messiah.

Eilidh: So, we use these, what did you call them, metaphors, to describe what Jesus is doing in the world, so we can understand, and have a picture of the real Jesus?

Ellie: Exactly! Why don't we listen [read] to the reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 10 right now.

WE LISTEN: 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.

WE REFLECT- 'The Good Shepherd' a sermon by Rev Russell Davies

A friend of ours in Dubbo retired to a hobby farm, and among other things ran a few sheep. Come shearing time, he rang a shearing contractor he'd known in Coonamble, where 10,000 to 30,000 would be a typical mob of sheep. "Can you shear my sheep?" he asked. "Sure. How many do you have?" "300." "Oh, that's nice," was the answer. "What are their names?"

The fact that just about everybody in the Dubbo Parish fell about laughing when Gordon Harcourt told that story on himself shows the difference between the biblical shepherd and the Australian sheep farmer. The biblical shepherd would not only have known their names, but their individual characteristics and needs.

In the Old Testament, God is often pictured as the shepherd, and the people as his flock. Many of the psalms use this imagery, most famously the 23rd Psalm. Jeremiah and Ezekiel use the image of the shepherd for the *leaders* of the people. Isaiah uses it as an image for the *messiah*. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are young."

In the New Testament these images pass over to Jesus. He is the shepherd who will risk his life to seek and save the one sheep which has gone astray. He has pity on the people because they are like sheep without a shepherd. His disciples are his little flock, and he is the good shepherd.

The image isn't surprising when you look at the land of Judea. The land around Jerusalem, from Bethel to Hebron, is a rough, stony plateau, thinly grassed, and

much more suitable for grazing than for agriculture. So the most familiar figure on the Judean uplands was the shepherd.

Sir George Adam Smith describes him well. "On some high moor, across which at night the hyenas howl, when you meet him, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, leaning on his staff, looking out over his scattered flock, every one of them on his heart, you understand why the shepherd of Judea sprang to the front in his people's history; why they gave his name to their king, and made him the symbol of providence; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice. Constant vigilance, fearless courage, patient love for his flock, were the necessary characteristics of the shepherd."

It was a hard life. The shepherd had no horse or motor bike to muster the flock; there were no boundary fences to keep them in. As well as robbers ready to steal the sheep, there were wolves and other wild animals to guard against. The ground was very craggy, and the sheep were likely to get lost and fall into a gully. The shepherd was always on the go and always on guard. He had to lead his sheep to fresh pasture when they had eaten out the sparse grass nearby, and be always on the watch against danger.

In the new lectionary, each year on the Fourth Sunday in Easter we look at John 10, the Good Shepherd theme. This year, Year A, the focus is on the door, the gateway, and the passage uses two different images for that.

In the first part of the reading, Jesus talks of the gatekeeper opening the door for the real shepherd. This is set in the village communal sheepfold where all the sheep from the village are sheltered at night. It is a substantial building with a strong front door. Only the gatekeeper has the key, and he will only open it to a shepherd he knows.

But if all the sheep in the village are there, how can the shepherd separate his own from the rest? HV Morton tells of seeing two shepherds who had sheltered their flocks in a cave near Bethlehem. In the morning one shepherd stood some distance away and called out to the sheep. All his own flock came running to him, because they knew his voice. They would come for nobody else, but they would always come running to the voice they knew and trusted.

Obviously Palestinian sheep are more intelligent than their Australian counterparts. We had a pet sheep in Dubbo. Her name was Cindy. She wouldn't come when you called. In fact, she wouldn't do *anything* except eat grass and sit on the bonnet of the car, denting it. We left her with one of the local cockies when we returned to Sydney, and she dented the bonnets on all *his* vehicles too.

In the latter part of the reading, Jesus says, "I am the door of the sheepfold." This is the hillside sheepfold, which was just a small area surrounded by a wall, but with no door or gate. The shepherd would settle them all inside, then lie down across the opening to keep out any intruders or wild animals, and keep the sheep safely inside. He made *himself* the door; there was no access to the sheepfold except through him.

That's what Jesus was talking about when he said, "I am the door of the sheepfold. All who came before me were thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and

out and find pasture.”

Let's take the last part first. Jesus is the door to eternal life, the rich, abundant life of the Spirit. As we follow him, his Spirit grows within us, guides and shapes us, and we become more and more like him. He is the Way, and if we don't want to mill around in life like a mob of confused sheep, then he is the one to follow. We know his voice; we trust his reliability; he is constantly calling us to obedience and service, and in his service we find fulfillment and deep meaning in life.

But just before that he said, “All who came before me were thieves and robbers.” This has often been misrepresented to make Jesus sound more exclusive than he was in reality. He wasn't talking about Abraham and Moses, or the great prophets of Judaism. Nor was he talking, as the triumphalists choose to interpret it, of the holy men and women of the other great world religions.

When he said, “All who came before me were thieves and robbers,” he was talking about the false messiahs who were *always* cropping up in Palestine; the Zealots who promised a violent overthrow of the Roman Empire and a return to Israel's golden age. Theirs was a narrow and violent nationalism which despised everyone who wasn't one of their own people. Most of them were rogues or adventurers, seeking personal glory. Their way would lead to slaughter rather than to glory. Although Jesus was later to be put on trial as though he were just another one of thousands of pretend-messiahs, he makes it very clear that the salvation he offers has nothing in common with their political and military solutions.

When Moses was seeking a successor to lead the children of Israel into the promised land, he said, “Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep who have no shepherd.” (Numbers 27: 17)

The leader of Israel, the leader of God's people, was not to be so much a military and political leader, although Joshua, Moses' successor, was that as well. He was to be a *shepherd*, a protector and guide for his people, under whose protection they could come and go as they pleased.

That's the image which Jesus uses about his own leadership, and a promise which he fulfilled perfectly. It's also the image which Peter uses about him in our epistle reading... “The Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

Interestingly, it is also the word the early church chose for its leaders, the bishops. We *still* talk about a minister's role as ‘the *pastoral* office,’ and the Pastor is the same as the Shepherd. I've got no pretensions ever to be made a bishop, but I was always conscious in active ministry that I was called to be pastor of *this* flock — *your* shepherd on behalf of the Good Shepherd and Guardian of *all* our souls.

Of course, that role isn't only the minister's. When we elect *elders*, we look for people who will take the role of the shepherd, guiding and strengthening the congregation, and if we are to be a missionary or evangelistic congregation, *all* our members have a shepherd role in the community, calling our neighbours and friends, workmates and all with whom we have contact to find that rich abundant life which is the gift of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

There's no hierarchy in that. There is only *one* Good Shepherd, and we *all* are his

flock. As we find our fulfillment in serving him, may we go in and out in his name, and find pasture.

One last story to close. The Revd Ross Godfrey went on a walking tour of the Galilee, and tells that everywhere he went in the countryside he saw images which might have come straight out of the Bible. But one image brought him up short in shock and disbelief.

He came across a flock of sheep in a narrow winding street. They were being pushed along from behind by a man wielding a big stick, hitting them if they didn't move along fast enough. Ross remonstrated with his local guide. "I thought the shepherd in the Holy Land was supposed to walk on ahead to encourage his sheep to follow." "Ah," said his guide. "That man is not the shepherd; he is the *butcher*."

Next time you're doing something with your neighbours or your community, please make sure you're being the shepherd, not the butcher.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

WE SING - TiS 659, "The Lord is my shepherd, and I want to follow,"

The Lord is my shepherd

And I want to follow

Wherever he leads me,

Wherever he goes.

Over the mountains,

The waters and byways,

Valleys and highways,

He's waiting for me.

Chorus:

I want to go to meet him there,

To lay myself down in his love.

The Lord is my shepherd

And I want to follow

Wherever he leads me,

Wherever he goes.

And while on the journey

To where we are going

He promised to be there

To help us along.

And over the mountains

We'll walk on together,

To know all the wonders

He's given to me.

Chorus:

WE PLAY

Many people are putting teddy-bears in the windows of the houses, so that kids get some exercise walking around the neighbour with the parents, they can go on a 'Bear-Hunt'.

Have some fun!

Share a simile with someone today.



WE ARE SENT

The Shepherd knows us,
the Shepherd calls us in
and sends us out
to love and serve
the waiting world. Amen.