

The Fourth Sunday of Easter – 2nd May 2020



Today we very much focus on Jesus being the good shepherd as our theme. Fr Rodney's words reflect on this later in the service. As you look at the photographs taken by Matthew and Adele on their daily walks, you realise how lucky we are to have such beautiful countryside on our doorsteps. As I reflected on the images I realised how the sheep are so often together in groups, close to each other for protection. The old saying 'to follow like sheep' can be a little derogatory at times but in these trying times we need to stick together, to feel the protection of each other and to keep our sites on Jesus as our shepherd, our guide, our leader and our protector and we do indeed need to 'follow like sheep'.

This week I have included both of the readings set for this Sunday, they both seemed to have so much to say today, with Peter reminding us it is never too late to return to the shepherd; but it is the last line of the reading from Acts, 'And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved', thou maybe not in the context it is set in, seems to be so appropriate for our times.

Collect for the day

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that we may seek those things which are above, where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds^[a] to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home^[b] and ate their food with glad and generous^[c] hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

A reading from the 1st letter of Peter

¹⁹For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²²"He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth."

²³When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross,^[a] so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds^[b] you have been healed. ²⁵For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.



A reading from the Gospel according to John

Jesus the Good Shepherd

"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. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Words from Fr Rodney

This Sunday has become known as "Good Shepherd" Sunday because of the Gospel that is traditionally read today in which Jesus calls himself the 'Good Shepherd'. Shepherds were a significant group of people in Jesus' time as they are in parts of the Middle East today, but as no doubt you have heard me say over the years, they did not drive their flocks of sheep as we see today, they walked in front of their flocks and their sheep followed them. This relationship of sheep and shepherd was drawn on by Jesus to illustrate

the relationship between himself and those who followed him. It was to be a relationship of trust and obedience, and that is what we are called to as his followers today. As we seek to follow Jesus in the midst of the present situation we may not be able to go to church, but we are not on 'holiday'. Jesus is still calls us to follow him in whatever ways lie open to us, to be his disciples in praying for one another, for our country, and for our world.

Intercessions

Good Shepherd as we are joined with our brothers and sisters in faith throughout the world we give thanks that we can come together in the spirit of love and unity. Teach us and our leaders to be faithful to the calling you gave us to be shepherds in your name, particularly in these difficult times when so many are looking for support, comfort and hope. Help us to take this time to recognise our connectedness, and to love one another as you have loved us.

Amen

Good shepherd, who has brought us through so many dark days, we bring before you our world and its leaders struggling to deal with so many problems and in need of you wisdom and guidance. We ask that you help us to put aside those differences that have caused us to prioritise our own interests above others and give us the will and the strength to spread compassion and work for justice. We particularly bring before you those areas of the world struggling to deal with the impact of the pandemic with limited resources and ask that they receive the help and support they need. We pray for wisdom and guidance for our own government and those in positions of authority making difficult decisions as to the best way forward during this crisis. Amen

Good shepherd we pray for our communities, for those who are lonely, anxious, burdened by financial worries and vulnerable. We also pray for those families who are struggling to live together in harmony and particularly all those who are trapped in homes where there is violence and abuse. We ask that their needs and all those struggling to cope are recognised so that they are able to access the support they need. We also give thanks for all the volunteers and front line services working so hard for the good of others and for all the many acts of kindness shown to us this past week. Amen

Good shepherd as we bring before you our families, friends and neighbours, we give thanks for their love and friendship and ask that you help us to care for them the best we can at the moment. Sustain them and us through this difficult period of separation and hasten the time when we can see one another again. Amen

Good shepherd we pray for those who are broken and sick particularly any known to us today.... we also think of all those suffering from the coronavirus, those who are caring for them and their loved ones. We pray also for those who suffer because their treatment has been put on hold at this time and we ask you to bless and guide the work of all those working on treatments and vaccines. Today we also say a special prayer for care home residents and staff who appear to be so very vulnerable at the moment. We pray that they are able to quickly access the resources and protective equipment needed to enable them to work safely and protect those they care for. Amen

Finally Good shepherd we remember all those who have gone before us, especially any we wish to pray for today... we also think of all those who have died recently due to the pandemic and for all those who grieve for them. We give thanks for their lives and pray that they are gathered safely into your fold. May they rest in peace, And rise in glory

Take a moment in silence as you bring your own prayers to God

The Lords prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

