

Service of the Word 11 October 2020

Pentecost 19

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to our service. This week we faced another round of government announcements imposing restrictions which will effect the lives and livelihoods of many, many people. There doesn't seem to be any end in sight just now and most of us are just doing are best to get through each day, each week. It seems impossible to lift up our eyes and hearts from the endless round of bad news. To lift up our eyes and hearts to what God may be saying to us this week. This week our scripture readings bring both comfort and challenge. So together let us lift our voices, virtual and present, to worship God the source of all life and blessing.

Gathering

We are gathered together as the family of God
to offer praise and thanksgivings
to ask forgiveness of our sins
to hear and receive God's holy Word
to pray for the needs of the world
and to seek God's grace
that through Jesus Christ our Lord
and in the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to God's service.

Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart.

Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided.

Lord, have mercy.

O Lord, all we long for is before you;

and our deep sighing is not hidden from you.
But we acknowledge our wickedness;
we are filled with sorrow at our sin.
Be pleased O Lord, to deliver us;
O Lord, make haste to help us.
May the Lord forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are
and direct what we shall be,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Praise

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to God's people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
with God the Son, Jesus Christ,
and God the Holy Spirit,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world;
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day

O Lord, since without you we cannot please you:
let the work of your mercy in all things guide our hearts; through Jesus Christ
our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end. Amen

First Reading Psalm 23 NRSVA

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.

Second Reading John 21:15-19 MSG

After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep."

Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Reflection

Psalm 23 - better known to most folk as The Lord is my Shepherd is probably one of the most loved of all the Psalms. Many folk

recognise it even if they have never heard of King David or the Book of Psalms. The image of Jesus as the good shepherd and his followers as sheep is linked with the familiar words of this Psalm. Which, of course, was written thousands of years before Jesus was born. But this image of the Lord as shepherd has always been very appealing to artists, musicians and poets resulting in a vast amount of stained glass, painting, music and poetry as well as a vast number of sermons, articles, hymns, retreats and meditations devoted to the image of Lord as Shepherd. So, it's with great reluctance and not a little trepidation that I or any other preacher wanders into this particular pasture and tackles these particular critters. You need to watch where you step because this image of the good shepherd is dear to so many hearts. However it is always helpful to understand what Jesus is trying to say to his disciples then and to us his followers now with this imagery.

As popular as it is, a problem with the shepherd-and-sheep image is that sheep do have a poor reputation for being passive, stupid even, docile and dull and so scatterbrained that they often wander off for no good reason and have to be rescued. If this is true, and I would dispute it, but if it is true and we are the sheep of God's pasture, are we supposed to be this kind of sheep?

I don't think so! This is not the point of the gospel or the psalm for us as disciples. Remember that shepherds don't generally keep sheep as pets. They keep sheep because they are useful, important, and essential for their livelihood. If the sheep don't produce the goods, the shepherd is out of business.

This is the part of the Lord is my Shepherd image that is about us as disciples. This essential quality of the sheep is about our part of what's going on in all this familiar and comfortable talk about green pastures and still waters. We are valuable and essential assets and if we don't come through there is no Plan B.

Jesus' promise in the gospels to be the Good Shepherd, is that he isn't going to leave us to the wolves or abandon us if we don't produce. God cares for us. Jesus has laid down his life for us. That sacrifice, that love, that blessing of continued care, these are simply gifts, signs of God's boundless loving kindness. They are given without condition and without exception. Wherever we find ourselves, in whatever circumstances, fit and active or resting a while in the pasture because life has thrown some really difficult stuff at us. These blessings are ours freely and unconditionally. This is what the Lord is my shepherd is all about.

The care that God offers to each one of us is intended to lead to something, something real and substantive. Our response to God's blessings is to give back, from who we are – from what we can do, from what our situation in life is, from our own unique skills, abilities, resources and gifts. This is what Jesus is asking of Peter in our gospel reading.

After the resurrection Jesus is passing the role of shepherd onto his disciples, through them down the years to us. There are times in our lives when the resources for shepherding may be great and times like now in the middle of this pandemic when they may be small or even feel non-existent but they are all equally valuable. We are tempted to think that unless we can do something big and spectacular then we cannot do anything at all.

The point of the sheep in the psalm and the gospel story is that we are needed! Without us, without any single one of us, the mission of the Lord and the work church is diminished. We matter - we are valuable assets. You and I, each one of us is a valuable asset for Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

This is where the green pastures, still waters image can sometimes be misleading. We are not blessed and protected by the Lord our Shepherd for the sake of our own comfort, convenience, personal needs or ease of life. If you read your Bible you will soon discover that nobody in the Bible is ever chosen for this sort of stuff. Instead, God's care and protection are always given that we might be better equipped for God's service. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, he pays the price, and protects us and cares for us. That's the way it is. But there is more to it than this. We are valuable, and important; and we have an essential role to play in all of this. Just now each of us may feel more in the need of shepherding rather than being a shepherd but if we look around our family, friends and community there are many who need to know that they are loved and cared for - our role is look after each other as surely as God our Shepherd looks after each one of us.

Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and 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.

Let us pray, for the church and the world, thanking God for the blessings in our lives

Intercessions

Blessing

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

Act of Dedication

Almighty God,
we thank you for the gift of your holy word:
may it be a lantern to our feet,
a light upon our paths,
and a strength to our lives.

Take us and use us to love and serve all people
in the power of the Holy Spirit
and in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Praise

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; *
you renew the face of the earth.

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; *

you renew the face of the earth.

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in all his works.

You renew the face of the earth.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; * you renew the face of the earth.

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Be with you and all those for whom you have a care this day and evermore. Amen