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# Service of the Word

## Easter 4      Good Shepherd Sunday

### 3 May 2020

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#### Gathering and Greeting

Good Morning and welcome to our service for Good Shepherd Sunday. When this lockdown started just over six weeks ago I thought it would be nice to try a few podcasts for Holy Week and Easter to tide us over until we could be together in church again. Well I can see now how naive that idea was! These online, recorded services are not just a stop gap. They are the new normal. So we are all learning new ways of being and doing church. Fortunately, after a sticky start last week and with some new volunteers on board you will get more than just my voice again this Sunday. I have rounded up a few sheep to help us celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday; Mary is reading Psalm 23 and Helen is leading our intercessions. Now that we have cracked the technology I hope to add new, familiar voices to our services each week to draw us closer together and closer to God in our worship.

We are gathered together as the family of God  
to offer praise and thanksgiving  
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.

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#### Penitence and Forgiveness

Return to the Lord, who will have mercy:  
**to our God, who will richly pardon.**      (*Isaiah 55.7*)

*A time of silence is kept,*

#### ***Penitential Psalm***

**I confess my iniquity:  
and am sorry for my sin.**

In you, O Lord, have I fixed my hope:  
You will answer me, O Lord my God.

O Lord, do not forsake me:  
be not far from me, O my God.

Make haste to help me:  
O Lord of my salvation. (From *Psalm 38*)

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. (*SEC Daily Prayer 1988*)

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### ***Praise***

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Rejoice, then, even in your distress.

**The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

He called us from our darkness into the light of this day.

**The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

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## **PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD**

### ***Collect of the Day***

*Let us pray,*

O God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice, we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Our first reading is Psalm 23, read by Mary*

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.[b]  
He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death  
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 forever.

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***Our second reading is from the Gospel of John, chapter 10,  
beginning at the first verse***

“Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he’s up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won’t follow a stranger’s voice but will scatter because they aren’t used to the sound of it.”

Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. “I’ll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn’t listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.

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## **Reflection**

I have preached a lot over the years about sheep. Which when you say it out loud sounds a little strange. It is probably more true to say that I have preached on a lot of Good Shepherd Sundays over the years. Sometimes in urban or suburban churches where sheep equalled leg of lamb and was found only on supermarket shelves. In the rural churches they got the whole sheep thing because like here in Strathnairn sheep are all around us. They are part of the fabric of our lives because each of us even if we don't keep sheep ourselves; each of us very likely knows someone who does. I wake each morning to the sound of my local shepherd checking on his flock in the field across from the Parsonage. Of course, he is in a pick-up truck rather than on foot but the principle is still the same. He is there every morning, in fact several times a day, checking on the welfare of his sheep.

So sheep and shepherds are very much a part of my preaching life. This year is no different except that the coronavirus pandemic has made all of us look at the ordinary things of our lives differently. This includes how we approach scripture and how a familiar Bible passage can suddenly speak very differently to us. When I listened to Mary reading the oh so familiar words of Psalm 23 one verse stood out in a way it has in only done a few other times during my life.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil;*

This got me to wondering about the shadows that are all around us these days which are certainly producing fear, anxiety and a sense of helplessness in us. Where does, or where should, our ability not to be fearful come from? This took me to John's gospel and the passage from chapter 10 that always goes hand in hand with Psalm 23 on this particular Sunday in the Easter season. The sheep are only fearful when they do not recognise the shepherd's voice. They are fearful when they are pulled here and there, led down blind alleys and confused by other voices. Lord knows there are plenty of those tempting voices around at the best of times. And we can plainly see these are not the best of times. How do we find the voice of Jesus, the true voice of God which will calm us, lead us safely through the darkness and keep us company when the going gets tough?

We need to listen perhaps more carefully than ever before for the voice of God, the voice of Jesus; in scripture, in prayer and in the words of comfort we offer to each other. We need to listen carefully to let the voice of our one, true Shepherd, the voice of Jesus speak to us and lead us through these difficult times.

It is too easy when we are bombarded by statistics, projections, plans and scientific data - it is so easy to lose sight of the one essential thing that John's gospel tells us: *He calls his own sheep by name*. God knows our name, God knows our fears, God knows how we are overwhelmed by this situation. Yes the science is vitally important and we need to listen to it. But we also need to listen to God's voice reassuring us that we are loved, cared for and held close whatever the circumstances.

For now some of us are on the front line facing the danger head on and many of us are sheltering in the sheep pen, holding tight to the Shepherd for comfort. The word used in the Gospel for comfort is not a soft, fuzzy sort of word. The word comfort means strength. This week I hope and pray each of us can find comfort, can find strength, by listening carefully for the voice of God who calls us by name. Amen

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### ***Affirmation of Faith***

**Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus:\***  
**the divine nature was his from the first:**  
**Yet he did not grasp at equality with God;\***  
**he emptied himself and became like a slave.**  
**Taking the nature of man**  
**he was revealed in human form;\***  
**he humbled himself and became obedient**  
**even to death, death on a cross.**  
**Therefore God has raised him on high,\***  
**and has given him a name above every other name;**  
**So that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,\***  
**in heaven, on earth, and in the depths;**  
**And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord;\***  
**to the glory of God the Father. (from *Philippians 2*)**

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### **Intercessions**

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

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## Lord's 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,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

### *Responsory*

This is the day that the Lord has made; \*  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
**This is the day that the Lord has made; \***  
**let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

I shall not die, but I shall live,  
and recount the deeds of the Lord.  
**This is the day that the Lord has made.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.  
**This is the day that the Lord has made; \***  
**let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

### *Prayer*

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. Amen. (*Common Worship*)**

***Blessing***

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life, the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and all those for whom we have a care; this day and evermore.  
Amen