

**Bulletin for Sunday 8 May 2022**

Good morning friends, on the fourth Sunday of Easter.

Let's pause as we prepare to worship... and then praise God as we sing another Easter hymn, continuing to celebrate Christ's resurrection:

Hymn: Come, ye faithful, raise the strain (R&S 236)

Prayer: Risen and living Christ,  
who named yourself a good shepherd,  
we thank you for the green pastures around us,  
for the trees filling up with fresh, new leaves  
and the hedges full of singing and nesting birds.  
We thank you for your open, welcoming arms,  
and the protective and healing care you offer.  
And we thank you for walking beside us, always.  
We ask your blessing on everything we do,  
and on everything we give in your service,  
today and every day. Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Readings: Psalm 23 and John 10: 22-30

Reflection: The Bible is full of tales of shepherds. Often these images of shepherding and sheep are used metaphorically, perhaps in reference to God's shepherding of the chosen people from Egypt to the promised land; or the expectations placed on the kings of the Jewish people, following in the traditions of King David, the original Shepherd King. It was some of these religious traditions that Jesus was able to connect into. The prophet Ezekiel, hundreds of years before, had quoted God as saying 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down'. So when Jesus said, in today's reading, 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me', he was claiming to be more than a literal shepherd... more, even, than an earthly King. Despite Psalm 23 being so well known, and widely loved, some people have worried that in our modern, urbanised world most people don't really understand stories about shepherds and sheep, and we should find more up-to-date comparisons. But I'm not sure

I agree. Recently (perhaps because it's Spring!) there seem to have been lots of TV programmes looking at the tough business of caring for sheep, some from the farmers' point of view, others based around vets. And few things will stop full grown adults in their tracks like a field of small but very bouncy lambs! I think we fully understand that lambing is seriously hard work, around the clock, and that the shepherd's care and skill often makes the difference between life and death. On our own journey through life we hope for still waters and for green pastures, but even more we long for the care of a truly committed and trustworthy shepherd. We are comforted by Psalm 23 precisely because it speaks of things which are as true now as they always have been. 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.' May it be so! Amen

Hymn: The Lord's my Shepherd (R&S 679)

Prayers: Compassionate and welcoming God,  
we long for the time when all will follow you,  
and dwell safely in the house of the Good Shepherd.  
We hold before you the people of Ukraine:  
the homeless refugees, the wounded and grieving,  
the trapped and the terrified...  
We remember the people and situations  
which have made the news this week;  
and we pray for carers, healers and peacemakers.  
We pray too for our own communities,  
for our neighbours, friends and loved ones.  
In Jesus 'name we ask all our prayers,  
including the unspoken prayers of our hearts. Amen

Hymn: In heavenly love abiding (R&S 344)

Blessing: May we trust God's loving care for us...  
and may the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us and with all those we love,  
this week, and always. Amen

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There will be a ' Sunday at Six 'service on Zoom at 6pm on Sunday - all welcome.

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