

Parish of St. Thomas, Apostle & Martyr, Ipswich

25th April 2021 - Easter 4

Collect:

Risen Christ, faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep: teach us to hear your voice and to follow your command, that all your people may be gathered into one flock, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

4 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.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.



6 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.

A reading from the book of the Acts of the Apostles (4.5-12)

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is

'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;
it has become the cornerstone.'

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John (10.11-18)

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, o Christ.

Reflection: For a townie born and bread, I seem to have been involved with sheep rather a lot in my life! As a child gathering wool on country walks – as a young man working on the North York Moors – as Vicar of Loddon watching their antics and shearing on the marsh behind the Vicarage – on holiday with Sylvia, seeing the heard instinct on the Isle of Lundy; all these things came to mind as I began to think about today's Gospel reading, for today Easter 4 has for centuries been known 'Good Shepherd Sunday', so why and how have sheep and shepherds come to mean so much to the Christian church?

Jesus and his culture: As a lad and a young man Jesus would have wandered the fields and hills around Nazareth – not a very big place even now, and in his day probably just a large village with a main Roman highway passing nearby and countryside on his doorstep. He would have had time and opportunity to learn about the ways of sheep and observe the difference between the 'Good Shepherd' and the Bad shepherd' which he describes in today's Gospel reading. The life of a shepherd then as now can be rough, hard, and demanding and the hired hands were often taken from the homeless of the area and not well paid, whereas the good shepherd would have been from the family who owned the sheep and therefore had more of a stake in their care.

He would have learned all the images of sheep and shepherds from the Hebrew scriptures (our Old Testament) and would know well the text from Isaiah 53 vs 6 'All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.' which we recognise from Handel's Messiah, and Mary may well have shared with him the story of the shepherds' visit to Bethlehem.

So one way and another, Jesus was no stranger to sheep and shepherds, and nor were those who listened to him – most of them would have known the Old Testament stories and would know someone who kept sheep. For most of us, however, understanding of shepherds and sheep comes from the plethora of farming programmes on our TV screens at the present time and we realise that unlike the rather sickly looking pictures of the Good Shepherd with a docile lamb on his shoulders, with which some of us grew up, the real image is very different. The shepherds we see are strong, capable men and women, who know what they are about, perhaps a bit rough round the edges because of the life they lead, but they are nobody's fool and nobody's pushover!

The shepherd I met on the North York Moors assured me that he did know each sheep by name and although this was before the arrival of quad bikes for rounding up the wanderers, he would walk for miles with his staff to drive them on or gather them up. (Unlike the eastern shepherds who would lead their sheep, as in the 23 rd Psalm, not drive them!) So what has all this to do with us and our understanding of the Christian life, worship and mission today? In using the image of the shepherd Jesus:

1. was not talking about some one who was 'meek and mild'! He was talking about strong, capable, knowledgeable people who, if they were doing the job properly held down responsible jobs in difficult circumstances.
2. he was talking about people who cared for those they had charge of. They had to protect the sheep from wandering wild animals who were looking for an easy meal. Finding good pasture, regular water and a safe place to spend the night, could not be left to chance.
3. If push came to shove, they had to be ready to die to protect their charges.

Does any of this sound familiar ? Verse 16 of today's Gospel Jesus says 'I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, one shepherd'. It is no accident that one of the badges of office of a Bishop is a Pastoral Staff, shaped like a shepherds' crook. Nor is it accidental that one of the descriptions of Christian ministers is Pastor. The word is derived from the Latin for 'shepherd'!

The early church not only understood this, but understood that it applied to the whole Christian community – all were to be seen as pastors / shepherds for each other that was the model Christ had set.... And not only pastors to each other, but to those among whom they lived and worked not just by preaching and talking, but by the ways they lived and loved, prayed and worshipped.

When I was a student over 60yrs ago, one of my friends used to rant against the church leaders because he believed that at that they did indeed see congregations as so many sheep to be told what to do and take no responsibility for the on going life and ministry of the church – except cough up the cash now and then! Things have changed a lot since then, and I suspect they will change even more in the years to come, but the challenge of Jesus the Good Shepherd remains the same to all who follow him – bringing in those who are outside the fold. As St. John puts it in his first letter chapter 3 vs18 (one of the readings for today) 'Children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action'

In our day this has to be seen in a world wide context, not just here in Ipswich. As followers of the Good Shepherd we have to care for the outsider wherever they are found, and we have to shepherd the resources of the world not just for our own sake but for the sake of the very world that the Good Shepherd so loved.

- Chris Chapman

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never.

I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow,
my ransomed soul he leadeth;
and where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me;
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill,
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and oh, what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days,
thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house forever.

Scriptures for our new priest:

We are hoping for a priest who can aspire to Philippians 2, and offer joy and humility in serving the Lord at St Thomas. To lift up holy hands in prayer (1 Timothy 2: 8) - and to keep hold of the deep truths of the faith (1 Timothy 3:9).

A prayer for Easter

Your love,
which breathed this world into being,
established a covenant people,
brought them out of captivity
and into a promised land.

Hallelujah!

Your love,
which from the moment of our birth
has known and called us by name
from out of this world's slavery
into the kingdom of God.

Hallelujah!

Your love,
poured into the heart of Jesus
who endured the nails of our sin,
defeated death to rise again
and causes our hearts to sing

Hallelujah!

Please pray for:

Those with chronic or long-term illness: Rosemary, Eric Dickerson, Jenny, Andrew Barfield, Kathy Steele, Andrew, Peggy, Margaret Christian, Natacha, Rex & Jill, Christine, Stephen, Samantha

Those undergoing treatment or currently ill: Katie, Gloria Elmer, Leslie Bloomfield, Roger Dickerson, Vicky & Matt, Dagmar, Roy, Kenneth Leek, Angela

All who are affected by the Coronavirus: *For all who have lost their jobs; all who are despairing and living with loss or anxiety. For hospital and health care workers.*

Those who have recently died, and their families mourning their loss: Sally Carson, Jean Dominy, Prince Philip. RIP

Prayer for our new Priest-in-Charge:

Lord, give us all wisdom and guidance as the search process goes ahead. We know that you have plans for us as a church - and we trust you. We pray that the right person will be drawn to us, that your Spirit will be at work.

Grant us a vision, Lord, to see what we can achieve, to reach out beyond ourselves, to stretch our capabilities, to increase our sense of purpose, to be sensitive to your presence at all times and listen to your call.

Amen.

Notices:

Joining Sundays online: we are no longer doing Zoom during Sunday services, but will livestream the service on our St Thomas facebook page.

Electoral roll: our new updated roll will be out on display today.

Faith Pictures: a 6 week course on Zoom starting on Weds 5th May. A great informal space to practice talking about faith with others. Speak to Malcolm to sign up.

APCM: our APCM this year will be on **Sunday 9th May** after the morning service. You will be able to join via Zoom if you aren't at church in person. Please put this date in your diary!

New Vicar Search: Please keep all involved in the interview process in your prayers.

Baby Bank: the Suffolk baby bank we are hosting in the community room would welcome donations of tinned potatoes, instant mash, and dried/long-life milk.

Lectio 365: an app to help you read the bible and pray! This is a free app which gives you short prayers and reflections, perfect for starting and/or ending your day with. Recommended by Rev Jackie.

Booking for in-person services: Sunday services must be booked into. Online booking forms are sent out via email. **To book by phone, call 01473 742973 and leave a message saying which service/s you are booking for, your name, and how many (including yourself) you are booking for.**

Pray for members of the St Thomas Congregation

Helen Pratt with Neil, James, Sophie & Adam; Jules Purnell with Rick & Amber; Linda Savage & family; Jackie Rathbone & family; Maggie Rose; Rachael Rudge & family; Joan Scott; Marilyn Smith

This Week:

Sunday 25th April

10am: Eucharist (Canon Chris preaching) with facebook livestream

Monday 26th April

11.30-1.30: Church open for prayer

4.30pm: STPC evening prayer on Zoom

Wednesday 28th April

10am: Eucharist

Thursday 29th April

11.30-1.30: Church open for prayer

4pm: Bible Basics

Sunday 2nd May

10am: Eucharist with facebook livestream

Church website:

<http://stthomasipswich.org.uk/>

Sunday Worship & other Worship resources on the Church Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/stthomasipswich/>



29th: Malcolm Gibbs
Margaret Bloomfield
1st May: Roger Dunnett

Contacts:

Acting Priest-in-charge: Revd Cat Connolly
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Cat's day off: Mondays

Lay Evangelist: Malcolm Gibbs m:07906 663530

Director of Music: Simon Clark BA (Hons) FLCM ARCO
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Church wardens: Roger Elmer m:07810 274586
Stephen Marginson 01473 258791

If you would like to chat, you could also ring:

Mary Bullass 625135 Gloria Elmer 745590
Rev Jackie 07962 172639 Revd Pat 464748
Rev Canon Chris 462109