

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

**John 10:11-18 (He died for us)**

**Talk by Russ Jones, Prayers by Margaret Davies**

Welcome to this Sunday worship in the season of Easter, where we will hear Jesus' description of himself as The Good Shepherd. His teaching brings us great hope. Let us prepare with words from Psalm 16 where the poet writes about his response to being welcomed into the secure care of God's provision and guidance:

Lord, you are my assigned portion and my cup; you safeguard my share. Pleasant places were measured out for me; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.

Now Margaret will lead us in our intercessions.

### **Prayers**

Let us confess to God.

Lord God, we have sinned against you, we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent of all our sins. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore to us the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

As a forgiven people, let us pray:-

Our Father in Heaven, we come looking up to you in awe and wonder. We worship and praise you and count our blessings of life and health, as you are the shepherd who leads us, giving us homes, family, friends, work and food. Thank you, Father God.

Lord, thank you that you guide us and protect us through life's ups and downs, particularly at present due to the virus. We pray you will keep us safe and well as the world opens up.

We pray you will guide our church especially in today's annual meeting in the decision making now and in the future. May your Holy Spirit be leading the right person to become our vicar; and guiding the church councils and leaders of Holy Trinity as well, to be following your will as we merge our two parishes. Bless our wardens, Ian and Steve, bless Andrew, Sally, Sue and each council member and church leader. We thank you Lord for all their hard work as you lead and direct them. We pray that your love through Jesus will be shown to the community through our outreach with CAP, reducing debt and helping clients, the food bank, Amaze Penge, the school, the Bible course and our services.

Almighty God, we pray for our world, especially those in authority. Thank you for our Queen, for her life of faith and service at her great age. Please comfort her and the whole Royal Family because of the Duke of Edinburgh's death. We thank you too for his life of faith and service

O Lord, we pray for the governments and leaders of our troubled world. May they have wisdom to deal with the pandemic, to spread the vaccinations everywhere, with wealthy nations sharing vaccines with poorer countries to bring Covid19 under control. We pray for diplomacy to be successful in negotiations about climate change, racism, for minds and hearts to change, and striving for peace in all the war torn areas of Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Heavenly Father, people suffer as a result, so we pray for those working to help refugees, homeless and distressed. Give them the resources in people and equipment to provide shelter, work, food, clothing and security where it is needed

Bless so many Christian Missions in their work for the love of Jesus. We pray especially for Jason and Tracey Day in Thailand. They ask us to pray for the spread of the gospel in Thailand and the world so that the seriousness of sin is realised and where all will spend eternity. Lord Jesus, we pray indeed for your gospel to be preached faithfully everywhere.

Dear Lord, we bring to you now in prayer those we know who are in any kind of need. Please carry on healing Will, making slow progress in hospital, Val's improving walking and general health, Geresse recovering after surgery, Sue, Julia, Zak and Karim's father. Support Will's wife Kath. Give her sleep and fortitude. Thank you that his son Sam is fine. Bless Emma and family. Pray for anyone you know in need now.....Bless them Lord.

To close we pray for ourselves in these words you probably know set to music:-

God be in my head and in my understanding;  
God be in my eyes and in my looking.  
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;  
God be in my heart and in my thinking;  
God be at mine end and at my departing.

In the name of Jesus our Saviour we ask all these prayers. Amen

### **Reading from Old Testament Psalm 23**

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
<sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.  
<sup>4</sup>Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,<sup>[a]</sup>  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
<sup>6</sup>Surely your goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
for ever.

### **Reading from New Testament John 10:11-18**

<sup>11</sup> 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> 'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.'

### **Sermon**

This is the fourth of Jesus's I Am statements in John's gospel. He is declaring that he is God, and telling us what that means for us, for our relationship with God. He's also contrasting himself, 'the good shepherd', with other religious leaders who are 'hired hands'. The key point that he repeats three times in this short piece of teaching is that he lays down his life for his flock. In this Easter season, we see that Jesus taught he was choosing to die; he willingly obeyed the plan made to rescue humanity through his death. He lays down his life, and he takes it up again.

'I am the good shepherd' is a simple metaphor but it carries a lot of suggestions. It reveals much. Goodness means a successful acting out of function and purpose, a fulfilling of true self, and God's goodness is at the centre of Jesus' nature. A shepherd is often used as a metaphor for a king of Israel in the Old Testament, someone who guides and cares for God's people, although shepherding is a humble occupation. Shepherds were despised by Egyptians, and were poorly regarded among Israelites too, but Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David were all shepherds at some point in their lives. Bear in mind too that shepherds didn't tend sheep in order to keep them healthy for slaughter – except the perfect ones used as sacrifices – they were asked to produce lambs, wool and milk. When they are cared for, the sheep will 'bear fruit', you might say; they will also be 'good' in that they achieve the best purpose of their lives.

In verse 9, there is a connected I Am statement, one that seems confusing at first: 'I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture'. Jesus is saying he is the key to prophecy, Scripture and history. He can command the people of Israel because he has been given the authority to do so. He opens the way into new pastures, so that he can lead every sheep that knows him, that trusts his voice, into new spiritual revelation and fulfilment. Pasture sustains and refreshes sheep, just as God will do for us when we allow him to care for us, as the author of Psalm 23 found: He restores my soul. More than deliberately laying down his life, he is promising that when he is resurrected, when he takes up his life again, he confirms his own purpose to bring us

abundant life. Psalm 23 describes a journey for the sheep, being led through the rich green summer pastures and then the darker autumn days, threatened with the valley of the shadow of death, before a final meal of celebration in the house of the Lord. This is our journey through life, which will certainly contain many problems and threats, but with the Lord's rod to guide and protect, and his staff to support and comfort us, we have the promise of being welcomed into God's presence. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. The good shepherd is the shepherd of the psalm. He is the way to follow, the gate that lets us enter God's kingdom, and then our guide and protector. Our lives will end; we will know the valley of death, but we will be anointed and welcomed to the feast in God's presence when the earthly part of life is over.

Jesus' death will be sacrificial, he repeats. He is willing to die for the sheep. When we read other passages from John, and understand that this teaching by Jesus draws its meaning from the Old Testament sacrifices of lambs as sin offerings, then we understand that he dies for the nation of Israel, the sheep already in his fold, but also for the whole world; 'other sheep that are not of this sheep pen'. His death is sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, but only effective for those who believe and accept it. John calls him 'the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' in chapter 1.

Shepherds would risk their lives to defend sheep, for example against a bear, but it would be unusual for the shepherd to die, and it certainly isn't his intention. The flock would be in even more danger then. Jesus is revealing something else; his death is not accidental but laid down in line with the Father's will. It is his death that proves he is the good shepherd, and by his death he draws us, his sheep, to him in closer and lasting relationship, so that he can protect us from the dangers we would otherwise wander into.

A small detail of language in verse 15 confirms this meaning, and it is how John uses the word 'hoo-pear', translated as 'for' when Jesus says 'I lay down my life for the sheep'. The word is always used by John in a sacrificial context, with the sense of 'in the place of', such as 'a man prepared to die for his friend' in chapter 15, or Peter's willingness to die at the end of chapter 13, or the repeated references to Jesus' own death. In all of these cases, the death is not an example; it is on behalf of, in place of, someone else. The shepherd doesn't jump off a cliff shouting 'See how much I love you!' to his flock, in a futile suicide, leaving them to defend themselves. Instead the sheep are facing mortal danger; the shepherd loses his life when defending them, and by his death they are saved. The good shepherd carries a cross as his weapon. When Jesus lays down his life, it is personal; he does it for each of us, the ones who have accepted him and believed, who know his voice.

The hired hand who runs away when he sees the wolf coming may well refer to the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' time, who were concerned with their own status and wealth rather than God's desires. They say in chapter 11 verse 48 'If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will take away both our place and our nation'. Notice the order of the words – they were more concerned with their self-interest than with their nation, but they loved their nation more than their people, since their leader then declared that 'it is better that one man die for the people than the whole nation perish.' Self first, their own idea of nation second, people last. That was the Pharisee leaders' thinking and may sound familiar now. The hired man looks as if he cares about the sheep when everything is normal, but when trouble comes, he cares more about his own safety. Remember, this teaching follows the miracle in John's gospel where the man born blind is

healed by Jesus, but he is put out of the synagogue by the Pharisees until Jesus meets him and cares for him. This isn't definitely about the ruling Pharisees, but it does act as a contrast to the good shepherd, and that is the key idea.

'I have other sheep that are not of this pen' refers to the Gentile church to come, once Jesus has spoken to his own Jewish flock. 'Salvation comes from the Jews,' he told the Samaritan woman when she asked him how and where she should worship, but salvation is promised to God's people who come from all nations. This is the promised fulfilment of the prophesied Messiah; Jesus himself gathers his sheep from the pen, the ones who respond to his voice, by first revealing himself to the people of Israel. He then gathers the wandering sheep of the whole world, if they are willing to respond, so 'there shall be one flock and one shepherd', verse 16.

He has personal knowledge of his sheep, who listen to his voice, and he loves them enough to lay down his life for them. His intimate care, based on the mutual love of the shepherd and his flock, is explained in verse 15 as a pattern found in the love between the Father and the Son. 'I know my sheep, and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father'. As so often, we find the unity of purpose, love, and obedience within the Trinity, God as three-in-one, forming a model for our own unity, our own purpose, love and obedience as part of the family of Christ. When we follow the shepherd, and experience his care day-to-day, when he answers our prayers and draws us closer to him, we learn to love and trust him more. As Psalm 23 put it, 'I shall not want, all the days of my life.'

The relationship between Father and Son is like that of the shepherd and sheep; the love of Father for Son, and Son for Father, is a picture of God's love for the world, and it makes salvation for the world possible. Our final verses, 17 and 18, make clear why the Father loves Jesus the Son. It is his unqualified obedience to the Father's will, his willingness to submit to the shame, pain, and isolation of the cross, to take on himself the curse reserved for the sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world. He is the Messiah and he obeys the plan prepared and prophesied so long ago, and it is why he cries out 'It is finished' on the cross. He lays down his life with purpose; it is in order to take it up again. Here is the Easter revelatory message. His death is not the intended end, with resurrection as an afterthought. He dies with assurance of resurrection; he dies in order to rise. By his humble obedience to 'this command I received from my Father', verse 18, he receives authority to die and rise. The resurrection glorifies him and makes certain the hope that we have, the promise of eternal life. The pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost will confirm that others, too, from every nation, will live.

## **Blessing**

A final blessing on us for the week ahead.

Almighty God,  
by your command time runs its course;  
forgive our impatience,  
perfect our faith,  
and, while we wait for the fulfilment of your promises,  
grant us to have a good hope because of your word;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen