

Welcome to our worship on this **Fourth Sunday of Easter, 3rd May 2020** coming from the **Parish of St Mark's in Reigate**. We're gathered together in a spiritual community, each of us in our own homes. I'm really encouraged by the numbers of people who are joining us each week via our website and welcome you especially if you're watching for the first time. We can all pray at home and lift up our prayers to our heavenly Father who always hears our prayers.

As you watch this broadcast, perhaps you can join in with the usual responses, the hymns and with the Lord's Prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

We join together in the Hymn: **I will sing the wondrous story**

**I will sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me,
how he left the realms of glory
for the cross on Calvary.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me –
sing it with the saints in glory,
gathered by the crystal sea.**

**I was lost, but Jesus found me,
found the sheep that went astray,
raised me up and gently led me
back into the narrow way.
Days of darkness still may meet me,
sorrow's path I often tread;
but his presence still is with me,
by his guiding hand I'm led.**

**He will keep me till the river
rolls its waters at my feet:
then he'll bear me safely over,
made by grace for glory meet.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me –
sing it with the saints in glory,
gathered by the crystal sea.**

Francis Harold Rowley (1854-1952)
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Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed for us.
Let us therefore rejoice by putting away all malice and evil
and confessing our sins with a sincere and true heart.

We have lived by our own strength, and not by the power of your resurrection.
In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and not believing.
In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon *you*,
pardon and deliver *you* from all *your* sins,
confirm and strengthen *you* in all goodness,
and keep *you* in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

We join together in singing this hymn version of the Gloria.

**Glory in the highest to the God of heaven!
Peace to all your people through the earth be given!
Mighty God and Father, thanks and praise we bring,
singing Hallelujah to our heavenly king.**

**Jesus Christ is risen, God the Father's Son!
With the Holy Spirit you are Lord alone!
Lamb once killed for sinners, all our guilt to bear,
show us now your mercy, now receive our prayer.**

**Christ the world's true Saviour, high and holy One,
seated now and reigning from your Father's throne:
Lord and God, we praise you! Highest heaven adores:
in the Father's glory, all the praise be yours!**

*Christopher Idle (b.1938) after Gloria in Excelsis
Copyright © Christopher Idle/Jubilate Hymns Ltd*

The Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Easter.
Let us pray that we may reign with the risen Christ in glory.

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.

Our first reading is brought to us today by **Stephanie Lawrence.**

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 verses 42-47

Many were baptized and were added to the community. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the first and last, says the Lord, and the living one;

I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.

Alleluia.

A reading from John chapter 10 verses 1-10

Hear the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said to the Pharisees: "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon:

Even though we are in the season of Easter, our lives may still feel like one long Lenten discipline of social distancing and fighting illness. Even as we proclaim the truth of the Easter resurrection, Good Friday's shadow still stretches over us. We know that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is faithful. So as we look at our Bible readings, we ask to be taught, to be healed, to be loved.

Today's gospel reading from John chapter 10 is the first part of a three-part story which unfolds throughout this chapter and gives us insight into

1. Who Jesus is

2. What that implies for him – that he will go on to lay down his life for us
3. What that implies for us – all that hear and believe him will be safe for ever

But so often when we read chapter 10, and even some commentaries on today's passage, rush onto the second, better known and remembered part of the story, Jesus as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, before considering and understanding the importance of the first part of the story which sets the rest in context.

Because today's reading is not about Jesus being the Good Shepherd – it talks about Jesus as the gate and a shepherd who the sheep will listen to. It's talking about who he is, not yet about what that implies for him or us.

Firstly, Jesus tells us that he is the gate, the means of access in and out of the sheepfold. Access to the Father, Jesus states, is through him and him alone. He is the Messiah, the one who brings salvation and a restored relationship with God to the world. Access to the Father is about a relationship, not about how well we've memorised or understood the law or scripture. A relationship with Jesus, who John tells us is one with the Father. As we come into the Father's presence through Jesus, so the Father's presence comes into us through him too.

This was radical stuff to those that first heard it. No more the superiority of the law and the structures and strictures that it brought. Up until now access to God had been exclusively through the Priesthood in the Temple and certainly not something that had been available to all. But perhaps, more radically still, Jesus alludes to himself as the one true Shepherd who the sheep will listen to; all who had come before were thieves and robbers. And in this context the implication was more than just as a pastor of some lost sheep.

In the time of Jesus, to refer to yourself as a shepherd in the manner in which he did had distinct overtones of kingship. The image which many of the hearers would have would be of David as the Shepherd King and leader. Jesus meant that they would make the link.

But bear in mind that this exchange seems to be taking place around the Feast of Dedication, as John mentions later in this chapter. It was a time when the Jews assembled in Jerusalem to celebrate the rededication of the Temple two centuries earlier, at the time the Maccabean revolt had overcome the Syrian Greeks to recapture the city. They'd found one small container of oil in the temple which still had the High Priest's seal on it and they used it to light the menorah which then lasted 8 days. The Feast of Dedication was when matters of authority and leadership and kingship were uppermost in their minds. Having stated so clearly who he was, Gate, Messiah, Shepherd, King, his hearers, including the Pharisees, just like us, were faced with two questions.

On hearing what Jesus was saying, they had to decide if it was true, for them at least. This is important, because if we are unclear about who Jesus is; we become more unclear about the Christian message, and especially about the certainty of Christian hope. Secondly, we have to decide if we are going to listen to him and not the many other voices around us which distract us from taking our full part in extending the Kingdom of God on earth. Just as it was in Jesus' time, it's a power struggle. Does the person who shouts loudest always win? Just because someone shouts the loudest it doesn't mean they are right. Do we give in to the things that distract us or are our ears fully open to the call of Jesus on our lives?

It's important because as Jesus calls us, he does not call us to stay in the security of the sheep fold. He calls us as the Shepherd who is the Gate and invites us to step out into the uncertainty of the world, with only his voice to lead and guide us. To enter into the messy world of pain, insecurity and doubt but also the world where true sustenance is to be found, where in living out our Christian calling we can find life in all its abundance.

At the moment we are being compelled, for very good reasons to stay in our own homes and avoid anyone else. If we stay in the security of our own home, our sheepfold, it initially may seem secure and cosy but ultimately we will wither away. We need the sustenance and experience that can only be found outside the sheepfold as we follow Christ. A few weeks of enforced isolation proves to us that we were not created to remove ourselves from the world. It's only by engaging with the world outside the sheepfold, with all its pain and difficulties, together with all the blessings and the joys, that our faith is truly tested and strengthened and we find life in all its abundance. One day soon, we will be able to leave our homes, but we will be changed people.

Jesus actively wants us to step out of our homes, when the time is right, into our vocation. Today is Vocations Sunday in the Church of England, a day when we are called to look at our lives and understand the calling that God has for each one of us. For many of us that will mean we carry on where we are, doing what we are doing, serving where we are serving. But perhaps for one or two it will mean a fresh challenge and a change in direction as we step out of the sheepfold once more into "pastures new".

Outside the sheepfold there are no fences, there are no structures. There aren't the constraints and guidelines of the Jewish law to guide us. Only the voice of the Shepherd who calls us out of the sheepfold and calls us to follow him, wherever it may lead. Are we willing to listen to his voice and follow him?

We sing the **HYMN The King of love my Shepherd is,**

**The King of love my Shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.**

**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 spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O 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 for ever.**

Henry Williams Baker (1821-1877)

Our faith is in the living God, and so we declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

On this day that the Lord has made,
let us pray for the people he has redeemed.

Richard Salmon leads us in prayer.

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

We sing the **HYMN I know that my Redeemer lives**

**I know that my Redeemer lives!
What joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;
he lives, my everlasting Head!**

**He lives, to bless me with his love;
he lives, to plead for me above;
he lives, my hungry soul to feed;
he lives, to help in time of need.**

**He lives, and grants me daily breath;
he lives, and I shall conquer death;
he lives, my mansion to prepare;
he lives, to lead me safely there.**

**He lives, all glory to his name;
he lives, my Saviour, still the same;
what joy the blest assurance gives!
I know that my Redeemer lives!**

Samuel Medley (1738-1799)

Let us pray:
Merciful Father,
you gave your son Jesus Christ to be the Good Shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection
and give us grace to follow in his steps;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Rejoicing in God's new Creation,
let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:
**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.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

The God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
make you perfect in every good work to do his will;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and all those
whom you love, this day and always. **Amen.**

Go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia!
Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia!

The St Mark's Singers have recorded *Go forth in peace* during this time of lock down. It involved the members of the choir recording their own parts in their own homes, and these recordings have been combined together. So even separated as they are physically, they have been able to sing together virtually and share with us now.