

# Worship At Home

21<sup>st</sup> April 2024

## Psalm 23 (The Message)

"God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from.

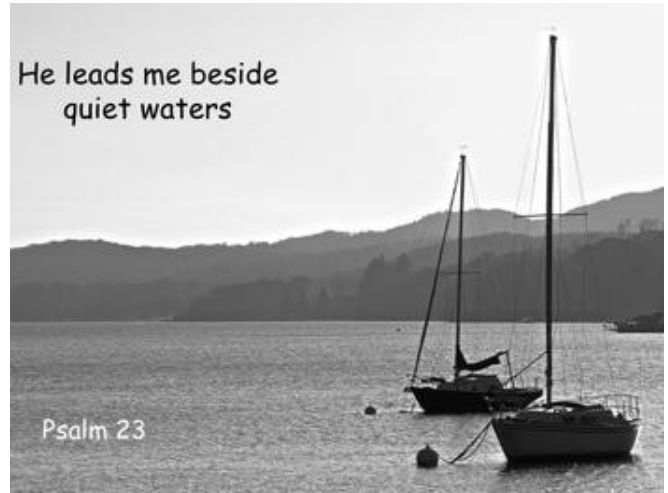
True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.

You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies.

You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing. Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life."

### Loving God,

I come to worship you today - ready to notice your presence. As I place my hands against my chest, I am reminded to love you with all my heart and I share with you in the silence my feelings as I meet with you. As I place my hands on my tummy, I recognise that I am invited to love you with my soul. And I come to you again thinking about your call on my life - what drives me and gives me purpose for your work. I take a moment to roll my hands into balls and think of how I apply all my strength and resolve as I approach you with love. Finally, as I put a hand on my head, I give thanks for all I know, all I can learn and all I can share. My mind is yours, O Lord. Loving God, as I worship this day, I come loving you with all my heart and soul and strength and mind, just as the ancients did before and generations will to come. **Amen**



[Photo and Prayer comes from Vine at Home, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2024]

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 490 Jesus, lover of my soul

<https://youtu.be/R6gc70yYeW4?si=VOinzYfScw9WVuj->

### Let us pray,

Great and gracious God, you promise us that when your Spirit lives in us we become your children, even the heirs to your kingdom. That is a wonderful promise and a blessing of hope for our future. With you, we don't need anything for you supply our needs when we trust Him to provide what we lack. Sometimes what we need is the strength to persevere through times of hardship.

Hope can be a fragile thing and is often shaken by the situations that we experience in everyday life. So, we ask that you will help us to hold on to our hope, even in the darkest days. When life is hard, and it seems that things will never change for the better - Strengthen our hope.

When pain is overwhelming and there is no relief, when grief is strong and weeping and anger are perpetual companions - strengthen our hope. When danger is threatening, and fear is a daily experience - when we lose control and feel lost and helpless - When our faith is at its lowest ebb, and we feel that you are far away - Strengthen our hope.

Understanding God, take our fears and failings and lead us gently into hope and confidence again. We are your children; grant us the courage to live and act upon the example that Jesus gave us, in the power of your own Spirit, and so to take your hope into the world of our daily living.

And, lastly, for myself...and in stillness, hear the invitation to bring your own prayers. **Amen**

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn -CH4 ?

Reading: John 10:11-18

Reflection: Good Shepherd

What do you think Jesus meant by 'I am the Good Shepherd'?



The metaphor of the Good Shepherd would have been understood by Jesus' original hearers, not least because theirs was a traditional farming culture. It's a context far removed from the world many of us in the UK live - mainly in towns and cities, mainly getting our food through supermarkets. The story that defines the Jewish audience Jesus was addressing begins with Old Testament stories of people keeping sheep and other livestock: Joseph's brothers were taking care of their father's flock when Jacob sent him to find them; David was a shepherd and Psalm 23 is a theological reflection upon God as the shepherd. The prophet Amos was also a shepherd and several of the Jewish festivals celebrate

the seasons of the agricultural year.

There is a difference between a good shepherd and someone who is merely paid to look after the sheep. As the gospel reading makes clear: the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, whereas the hired hand, who does not own the sheep, does not look after them when danger threatens. He sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep and runs away, so that the wolf is free to attack.

At night, the good shepherd, would lie across the entrance to the sheepfold to protect them from danger and would stay close to them, to guard them, during the day, when they were outside the fold.

Often, a flock would consist of sheep and goats, who both look very similar, unlike our native sheep and goats, the difference being sheep have wool and goats have hair. Goats never sleep inside the fold, they stay outside at night. Sheep and goats are easy to separate at night but really difficult at daytime.

At the beginning of the gospel passage Jesus say, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

So, this passage also comments on leadership - and when Jesus says this famous line, he knows that some of the Pharisees and religious leaders are listening in too. Are they being criticised by this presentation of another kind of leader? As Richard Rohr says: 'the best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better.' Is that what the Jewish leaders become so challenged and upset by Jesus?

The Pharisees could well have been deeply offended and enraged by the teaching of this upstart teacher and healer. Some of his more sympathetic auditors may have thought about their heritage and perhaps the more learned ones among them were trying to recall the scriptural references for Jesus' teaching.



In the Gospel of John, just before the passage we have read today, there is the Parable of the Shepherd that reveals further information about shepherding in 1st century Palestine (John 10.1-6). This was a physically and mentally demanding role. They were often alone in bleak, isolated settings. To prevent



themselves from falling asleep and leaving their sheep unguarded, shepherds would physically act as the doors to the sheepfold so that the sheep would have to step on them in order to escape. Acting as living gates to the fold - standing guard, literally.

Whilst identifying himself as the Good Shepherd, Jesus pledges his willingness to die for the sheep. Whereas a hired man, when put to the test might run from danger, Jesus would remain. Jesus, having identified the contrast between the hired man and the good shepherd, goes beyond the confines of the imagery of his parable to warn of his death, giving a glimpse of the role that only he could play, for only he would willingly lay down his life to show the possibility for new life, for new possibility, for a fresh start. For resurrection.

Read through and reflect on the questions that speaks to you.

- What does being 'the Good Shepherd' mean to you?
- How can you demonstrate 'good shepherd' tendencies in the roles and responsibilities you have in your life?
- Jesus says several times that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, what does that mean to you?
- Was Jesus forced to do this?  
Who are the sheep that are from another pen?



### **This week's prayer list.**

1. Give thanks for the long history of Christianity around the world.
2. Pray for the areas of our world where Christians, experience repression and persecution. (e.g. North Korea; Afghanistan; Somalia; Libya; Pakistan; Eritrea; Yemen; Iran; Nigeria; Iraq; Syria; Sudan; Saudi Arabia; Maldives; Egypt; China; Myanmar).
3. Pray that there can be a greater respect for the human rights of all the peoples living in these countries.
4. Pray for just changes for those living in situations of poverty and discrimination
5. Pray for the healing of past wrongs and distorted memories of what has occurred
6. pray for the shepherds within our own churches. Those that keep watch, guarding your flocks. Those willing to go out and search for sheep in need. Pray for all those who willing go out each day to tell others about Jesus.
7. Pray for the sick, the elderly and bereaved: that the Good Shepherd may give them courage and lead them beside the restful waters of healing and peace.
8. Remember those around the world who are hostages. Pray that one day soon they will be released to return home safely. Pray for God's peace to wash over them and their<sup>3</sup> families as they await news of their loved ones.

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that we may seek those things which are above, where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

**Activity : Something to think about**

**April 20<sup>th</sup> - May 21 has been designated less-plastic month**

Reuse small soft-fruit punnets as seed trays or use cardboard loo roll tubes for planting seedlings instead of little plastic pots. When you empty a plastic dish/packaging ask yourself what new use it could be put to.

**Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - MP 1008 The Lord's my shepherd**

[https://youtu.be/-eIQQayhpak?si=2q6m\\_7GXTDZuPvkD](https://youtu.be/-eIQQayhpak?si=2q6m_7GXTDZuPvkD)



*May I go out disrupt all that is wrong, unjust and hateful in this world.*

*May I nurture and plant seeds of love.*

*May I celebrate your coming into this world - then, and now, Immanuel.*

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. **Amen.**

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*Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day.*

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*If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you.*