

# Worship At Home

8<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Take some time to read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm out loud.  
Listen to the peace between its lines.

## A psalm of David.

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd. He gives me everything I need.
- 2 He lets me lie down in fields of green grass. He leads me beside quiet waters.<sup>3</sup> He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths for the honour of his name.
- 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for You are with me. Your shepherd's rod and Staff comfort me.
- 5 You prepare a feast for me, right in front of my enemies. You pour oil on my head. My cup runs over.
- 6 I am sure that your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. And I will live in the house of the Lord forever.



Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 157 Sing of the Lord's Goodness

1 Sing of the Lord's goodness,  
Father of all wisdom,  
come to him and bless his name.  
Mercy he has shown us,  
his love is for ever,  
faithful to the end of days.  
*Come, then, all you nations,*

CCL 1160072

*Come, then, all you nations,  
sing of the Lord's goodness,  
melodies of praise and thanks to God.  
Ring out the Lord's glory,  
praise him with your music,  
worship him and bless his name.*

2 Power he has wielded,  
honour is his garment,  
risen from the snares of death.  
His word he has spoken,  
one bread he has broken,  
new life he now gives to all.  
*Come, then, all you nations,*

3 Courage in our darkness,  
comfort in our sorrow,  
Spirit of our God most high;  
solace for the weary,  
pardon for the sinner,  
splendour of the living God.  
*Come, then, all you nations,*

4 Praise him with your singing,  
praise him with the trumpet,  
praise God with the lute and harp;  
praise him with the cymbals,  
praise him with your dancing,  
praise God till the end of days.  
*Come, then, all you nations,*



<https://youtu.be/MvXeyUMg20k>

**Let us pray together** come before the God of our salvation, offering him all praise and glory. Lord, as we offer ourselves in worship to God, saying: Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Awesome God, full of glory, you fill our hearts with your love. Awesome God, full of blessings, you fill our lives with your wisdom. Awesome God, full of riches, you enrich us with power and strength for all the ups and downs of life. Awesome God, full of Grace, we love you and glorify your mighty name.

Lord, you walk with us through all kinds of terrains in life: mountains, mole hills, valleys,

When the going gets tough and life takes on a dark hue - black, blue - we sometimes attempt to push through it on our own, only to find ourselves weighed down and getting nowhere fast. We may despair of ever being rid of our burdens and seeing life in colour again. Forgive us for these times, for not resting in you, for not trusting in the light of your promises, for not persevering in faith.

When things are going well and we're galloping on enjoying life in colourful detail - yellow, crimson - we often take you and others for granted. Forgive us for not being more aware and appreciative of your company, for not recognising or acknowledging your blessings and guidance. Forgive us our self-absorption. Merciful Lord, forgive us, we pray. You Lord are our shepherd, who restores our soul. You wash us clean and anoint us with the oil of forgiveness. Thank you, Lord. **Amen.**

**Readings:** James 2: 14-26 and John 10:22-42

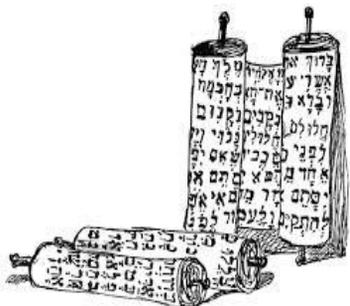
### **Reflection:** Dedication

It feels strange to be reading this passage from John's gospel in springtime as the 'Festival of the Dedication', better known today as Hannukah/Chanukah, a Jewish winter festival of lights. In 2021 Jews began celebrating Hannukah on the evening of Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> November and it ended when darkness fell on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December. This year it will begin at sunset on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> December and end at sunset on 26<sup>th</sup> December. Its origins go back to the period of the Maccabean revolt, in the 2nd century BCE, against the Seleucid Empire which had taken over the temple in Jerusalem and was attempting to Hellenise its Jewish subjects. Hannukah marked the recapture and rededication of the Temple by Jewish freedom fighters led by Judas Maccabeus, as recorded in 1 Maccabees 4:36-59. Antiochus Ephiphanes of Syria had persecuted Israel and in 170 BC He conquered Jerusalem. The Jews' liberated the temple from Syrian domination in 164 BC. It was celebrated in people's homes by the lighting of lamps and candles during the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah).



John is reminding us of these events as Jesus is walking in Solomon's portico during the festival of Hanukah - that celebration of the rededication of the temple following its defilement by Antiochus IV. Antiochus IV was a Greek ruler who also went by the name "Epiphanes." - God Made Manifest. And the Roman empire was famous for claiming that Caesar was a god. That's why it was so scandalous for Jesus to say, "give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." So, if Jesus is claiming to be one with the Father, how is that different from all those pagan emperors who claimed to be divine?

The feast of the Dedication would have been a time when the Jews (including Jesus) would have been thinking of these stories of the Maccabean martyrs stories which would be as familiar to them as Robin Hood or King Arthur or William Wallace or Robert the Bruce are to most of us. The fundamental beliefs and values of the Maccabees meant that they allowed themselves be killed rather than deny their faith.



In the atmosphere of this remembrance, the Jews ask Jesus if he is the Messiah. They know it is a loaded question, one that could either end with the execution of a political rebel or show him up as the charlatan that they believed he was. Jesus tells them that he has already answered them, but not with words. His actions have spoken for him. To understand who Jesus is, we need to look at his actions and to realise that they tell us all that we need to know.

Reading a little further in John 10, you will find the crowds asking this same question, and becoming angry enough to pick up stones to throw at Jesus. And Jesus will tell them, "If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and believe that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." (vv 37-38). But the Jews want easy answers from Jesus - 'Who are you? Tell us plainly.'

Jesus knows his identity is clearly demonstrated in what he does. He is doing the work of the Father. That's his job. Our identity as his sheep is just as clearly demonstrated in what we do. Our job is to follow him. And the only way we can follow him is to listen for his voice, and go where he calls us to go. There are rarely any easy answers - the best answers are the ones that we figure out for ourselves, often by intense mental and emotional struggle. It's like watching children working out a problem - adults often find it very difficult not to leap in and help them out, but it's vital to allow them to find their own solutions.

Tabitha (or Dorcas) is a female disciple known for her actions - a life of 'faith acted out' that witnesses to the world around her. When Peter is called, the widows show him the evidence of her actions as evidence also of her belief and faith. It's never a question of either faith or works - as James says, you really can't have one without the other (James 2.26). True faith will always be shown in the way that it is lived out.

Jesus' answer probably infuriated those who had asked the question in the first place, even further. He then goes on to speak of his identity in a way that suggests he is far more than just the human liberator or Messiah (the Anointed One) whom Jewish people were expecting and looking out for. By describing himself as the 'Shepherd' he is implicitly identifying himself with God and he makes this explicit in v. 30, 'The Father and I are one'. Small wonder that 'the Jews' want to stone him for blasphemy.

All this academic speculation would have been of no help to the crowds who looked to Jesus in his lifetime for hope of liberation from foreign rule, any more than it would have been to beleaguered Christians somewhere in Asia Minor reading John's gospel for the first time for confirmation that they had not been foolish to put their faith in the risen Jesus. Nor is it enough for our 21st century congregations in differently trying times.

What worshippers sought then and seek now is reassurance that they are not alone in a hostile or indifferent universe; that they are known and cared for; that despite the uncertainties of life and the imminence of death, they are safe in loving hands. That we find in the words attributed to Jesus by John in verses 27 to 30. For those who are part of the flock there is nothing to fear. The shepherd knows his sheep and will take care of them, no matter what.

When we hear him and follow him, Jesus claims us as his own. And he does more than call to us. He does more than know us by name. He gives us eternal life and promises that no one can snatch us out of his hand.

This is the ultimate promise. Once we belong to Christ, we are his forever. As the old gospel hymn says, we are "safe and secure from all alarms." Jesus offers this promise to us today. Jesus is saying to us now, "You hear my voice. I know you, and you follow me. I give you eternal life, and you will never perish. No one will snatch you out of my hand."



**God of all nations**, in faith and with trusting perseverance, we pray for those suffering as a consequence of the policies and decisions of their leaders; for those living in war zones; for those fleeing their countries; for those battling with the effects of climate change; for those left with less than they need to survive; for those whose daily lives are controlled by others.

We pray for those who work in caring professions; those suffering from exhaustion; for those feeling demoralised; for those they aim to support and minister to; for those waiting for help and treatment; for those in the last stages of their life.

We pray for the church throughout the world; for leaders who have lost their way; for those ministering in divided communities; for those in places where the church is marginalised, persecuted or simply deemed irrelevant.

We pray for the young people of our world; for children traumatised by war and violence; for those whose abuse goes unreported; for those sitting exams; for those struggling to find their way in the world.

And we pray for one another; and entrust to you those things that worry us; those situations we feel helpless in; those decisions that burden us; those losses that overwhelm us.

Lord Jesus, be with them through their ups and downs, and wipe every tear from their eyes.

**Amen.**

**Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - Hymns of faith 434 Follow, Follow**

<sup>1</sup> Down in the valley with my Saviour I will go,  
Where the flow'rs are blooming and the sweet waters flow;  
Everywhere He leads me I will follow, follow on,  
Walking in His footsteps till the crown be won.

*Follow! follow! I will follow Jesus!  
Anywhere, everywhere, I will follow on!  
Follow! follow! I will follow Jesus!  
Everywhere He leads me I will follow on!*

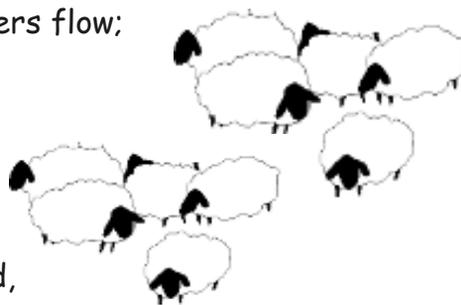
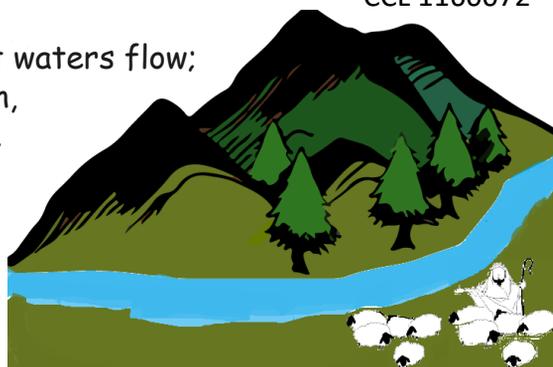
<sup>2</sup> Down in the valley with my Saviour I will go,  
Where the storms are sweeping and the dark waters flow;  
With His hand to lead me I will never, never fear,  
Danger cannot fright me if my Lord is near.

*Follow! follow! I will follow Jesus!*

<sup>3</sup> Down in the valley, or upon the mountain steep,  
Close beside my Saviour will my soul ever keep;  
He will lead me safely in the path that He has trod,  
Up to where they gather on the hills of God.

*Follow! follow! I will follow Jesus!*

CCL 1160072



<https://youtu.be/D3tRGD7rmwM>

We belong here with God's family, but we also belong in his world.

Thank you, Lord, that you send us out to turn our beliefs into actions.

You are with us, behind us and in front. We go now in your name, and in your love.

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. 4