

Worship at Home Service Sunday 21st April 2024 with Revd Alan Sharp.

StF 134: “Christ whose glory fill the skies”

www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjB_bKGhkM4

Christ, whose glory fills the skies, Christ, the true and only Light,
Sun of righteousness, arise, triumph o'er the shades of night;
Day-spring from on high, be near; Day-star, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn, unaccompanied by Thee;
joyless is the day's return, till Thy mercy's beams I see,
till they inward light impart, glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine, pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, radiance divine, scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display, shining to the perfect day.

Opening prayer

Good shepherd of the sheep, by whom the lost are sought
and guided into the fold; feed us and we shall be satisfied,
heal us and we shall be whole, and lead us that we may be with you,
with the Father and the Holy Spirit, where you reign one God for ever.
Amen.

Bible reading: Psalm 23 & John 10.11-18

Reflection:

Some time ago I was with a family to plan a funeral. One family member wanted to be involved so I suggested that they read Psalm 23. I received a message later, asking if I could suggest something else as that Psalm was too frightening.

I had always thought of Psalm 23 as offering comfort but, I assume, reading about “the valley of the shadow of death” created problems.

Today the Gospel passage speaks about Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The idea of God, or Jesus, as a Shepherd is one that I have known since my earliest days. The strange thing is that I was not brought up in an area where there were sheep -

I had never seen a sheep or a shepherd at work. Jesus talked about shepherds and sheep because he lived in a place where shepherds were common.

People would see them passing through their villages and towns with their flocks of sheep on a daily basis. Sheep were an important source of wool and people relied on this, not least for much of their clothing and household fabrics.

I think that when we read Psalm 23, we often link it to this picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. We imagine everything in the Psalm as illustrating the care of Jesus for us.

I like to reflect on the verse which says, "He restores my soul." It speaks of several things to me.

First, it reminds me of the store cupboard used by my mother. In it she would keep various foodstuffs, especially those that were not everyday items. Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon she would look out of the window and see the arrival of an uncle and aunt, who had come by motorcycle from across the town. Out would come a tin of salmon so that she could make sandwiches for tea - a special treat and cut in triangles! But when she next went shopping, she'd buy another tin or whatever she'd used, to stock up the cupboard - to re-store it. There was always something in reserve.

Of course, our personal reserves can get run down too. But it's not so easy to recognise that. It's not like seeing empty space in the cupboard. But the day-to-day stress of life can become demanding. There's a great awareness at present about mental stress, which can be more debilitating than a physical problem. I believe that if we bring our concerns to Jesus in prayer, his grace is sufficient for us. He restores our soul.

Secondly, it reminds me of the work of an art restorer. Some years ago, the paintings in the Sistine Chapel were cleaned and were restored to reveal colours and details that had been unseen for years.

Such people are so skilled that they can even reveal a painting that has been hidden beneath another of less importance.

We may need restoring too. Especially if life has been unfortunate, if we have made wrong choices, if early hopes have been squashed. We do not have to stay disappointed, to feel that life is not worthwhile. Jesus can restore us and help us to find purpose and new direction.

The prophet Joel knew of this when he said “I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten” after there had been four years of failed harvests. Finally, the word restore reminds me of the Prodigal Son, whose father welcomed him back and restored him to a place in the family. In one parable Jesus speaks of the Shepherd searching for a lost sheep, leaving 99 in the fold, finding the one that was lost and bringing it back. God’s love reaches out to everyone, even those who have squandered life’s opportunities. Many of Charles Wesley’s hymns illustrate this and in one he writes:

Your undistinguishing regard
Was cast on Adam’s fallen race.
For all you have in Christ prepared
Sufficient, sovereign, saving grace.
(StF 320 v3)

“For all” - John and Charles Wesley lived in a time when there was a belief that God selected people for salvation - predestination. But the Wesley brothers rejected that. They believed that anyone could be restored into God’s family the Church. Do we?

Our next hymn is the Stuart Townend version of Psalm 23. He’s written: *“The psalm is familiar to many as a psalm of comfort, in, for example, funeral services. But I also noticed that the psalm uses a lot of ‘movement’ imagery (walking, leading, following, etc) that speaks to me of an active response of faith to what the psalm is saying – we are to live each day believing goodness and mercy are following us, that there are still waters and green pastures to be found. That’s why I included a response in the chorus of ‘I will trust...’ “*

StF 481: The Lord’s my Shepherd www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOuLJ9mPUIQ

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green,
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone. And I will trust in You alone
For your endless mercy follows me, your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness, and he anoints my head with oil;
And my cup - it overflows with joy, I feast on his pure delights.
And though I walk the darkest path. I will not fear the evil one,
For you are with me, and your rod and staff. Are the comfort I need to
know. © *Stuart Townend (see end note)*

Prayers of intercession

We pray for the lost sheep of this world: for politicians striving to hang onto power and influence, for leaders of the nations who have forgotten to serve the common good.

We pray for the lost sheep of this world: for those who follow the fashions and frivolities of today at the expense of tomorrow, for those who get swept along by the crowd on tides of prejudice and easy judgements.

We pray for the lost sheep of this world: for those who wander off on their own, to escape from reality, for those who are led astray, away from safety and well-being.

We pray for the lost sheep of this world: for those who take what they have for granted, for those who are unable to give thanks for the things they have. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

StF 67: This, this the God we adore. www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1Ume0o-Blg

This, this is the God we adore, our faithful, unchangeable friend,
Whose love is as great as his power, And neither knows measure nor
end:

'Tis Jesus, the first and the last, Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise him for all that is past, And trust him for all that's to come.

Benediction.

Lord, send us out like sheep who know their shepherd well, with wisdom
to follow in Christ's footsteps and obey his commands, and the power of
his Spirit to guide and bless us. **Amen.**