

Worship at Home with Local Preacher Jenny Brooks for the 30th April 2023

Jesus the Good Shepherd

Lord as we gather, we feel your arms surrounding us. You know us and we rejoice in knowing you.

Singing the Faith 481

1. 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.

*Chorus: 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.*

2. 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.

Chorus

3. 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.

Chorus

Stuart Townend

Readings

Ezekiel chapter 34 verses 1-31

John 10 verses 1-18

Singing the Faith 272

1. From heaven you came, helpless babe,
Entered our world, your glory veiled,
Not to be served, but to serve,
And give your life that we might live.

Chorus: This is our God, the servant King, he calls us now to follow Him, to bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to the servant king.

2. There in the garden of tears my heavy load he chose to bear: his heart with sorrow was torn, yet not my will but your he said.

Chorus

3. Come see his hands and his feet, the scars that speak of sacrifice, hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered.

Chorus

4. So let us learn how to serve and in our lives enthrone him, each other's needs to prefer, for it is Christ we are serving.

Chorus

Graham Kendrick

Prayers

God of all, help us to understand what you mean to us and what we mean to you; what you have done in our lives.

Though we may not be gifted with words, help us to talk to those we know about you. May our actions also speak of grace and love.

When we get things wrong, help us to recognise that and say sorry, where possible.

We hold in our minds those we love and cherish who are struggling at this time. We ask that they may know your love.

Thank you God that in you we have the safety of your abundant forgiveness.

We say **The Lord's Prayer**

Message

The image of God as a shepherd is a very ancient and powerful one. The Ezekiel reading summarises a number of the times God speaks through the prophets, using shepherding as a metaphor for his relationship with the people of Israel. In a pastoral society where most people were subsistence farmers, this would have made a lot of sense to those who spoke and those who listened.

We live in a world where most of us have nothing to do with the care and management of sheep – we are just consumers of meat and wool. Because this was such an embedded metaphor within the people Jesus lived alongside, it's not surprising that he uses it often. No explanation is needed. However, in the reading from John's gospel, clearly those listening didn't understand what he was telling them. Perhaps not because the metaphor was unfamiliar, but because the person saying these things looked like an ordinary man – not a great ruler/king/ Messiah – or at least not what Jesus' listeners thought of as Messiah.

Sometimes we can miss important information because it comes to us in a way we're not expecting - or from a source that feels out of context.

John's gospel is written in such a way that he has gathered together parables and sayings of Jesus around themes and this chapter is all about shepherding. Perhaps so that we don't fail to understand its significance.

In the first 5 verses Jesus doesn't name himself, he is reflecting on the "true shepherd". This phrase is also in the Ezekiel reading, as a comparison to those who should be leading the people, but are looking after themselves instead. Those listening to Jesus don't seem to be making that connection, so he goes on to explain in verses 11-18 "I am the Good Shepherd", also refuting claims that he is "mad".

The western European art tradition gives the image of Jesus as Good Shepherd a very sugary gloss - lots of flowers, grass, children and lambs playing. In reality Jesus words were troubling to all in authority; claiming to be the Good Shepherd put Jesus in opposition to everyone else who claimed authority over the people – religious and secular. Chapter 10 ends with Jesus having to leave in a hurry because people were threatening to stone him

Sometimes it is important for us to recognise the radical nature of Jesus message. Love for all is his commandment and we will often find fulfilling that a difficult path to tread. Our strength comes from knowing the power of his spirit with us.

Singing the Faith 322

1 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds, in a believer's ear! It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds and drives away our fear.

2. It makes the wounded spirit whole, and calms the troubled breast; tis manna to the hungry soul and to the weary, rest.

3. Dear name- the rock on which I build, my shield, my hiding place, my never failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace

4. Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend, my Prophet, Priest and King, my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, accept the praise I bring.

5. Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest thought, but when I see thee as thou art, I'll praise thee as I ought.

6. Till then I would thy love proclaim with every fleeting breath; and may the music of thy name refresh my soul in death. *John Newton*

Poem

I offer this poem as a reflective prayer on the theme of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the Gate of the sheepfold. The writer is Malcolm Guite and comes from a collection called Parable and Paradox, published by Canterbury press.

I AM the Door of the Sheepfold

Not one that's gently hinged or deftly hung,

Not like the ones you planed at Joseph's place

Not like the well-oiled openings that swung so easily for Pilates practised pace,

Not like the ones that closed in Mary's face

From house to house in brimming Bethlehem, Not like the one that no man may assail, that waits your breaking in Jerusalem.

Not one you made, but one you have become: Load bearing, balancing, a weighted beam to bridge the gap, to bring us within reach of your high pasture. Calling us by name, you lay your body down across the breach, yourself the door that opens into home.