

Simple Prayer, Simple Praise:
A Worship Service for Sunday, May 3, 2020

Opening Acclamation: (Psalm 23)

The LORD is my shepherd; * I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures * and leads me beside still waters.
He revives my soul * and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; *
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; *
you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.
Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

A reading from the Gospel According to John 10:1-10

Jesus said, "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."

Meditation (by *The Very Rev. Dr. John P. Downey, Canon Theologian*)

This Sunday is often called "Good Shepherd Sunday" and, indeed, the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd runs deep in scripture and in the art, music, and devotion of Christians, even if we have little experience of sheep and shepherds. The large stained glass window above the Baptismal Font in the church where I grew up depicts Jesus shouldering a lost sheep.

In today's Gospel, Jesus first says he is the shepherd who enters by the gate, calling and leading his sheep. Then he says he is the gate. While this may be perplexing, it is part of a longer reading in which the image of Jesus as shepherd is richly explored from many angles.

While Psalm 23 was composed centuries before the time of Jesus, Christians have seen Jesus the Good Shepherd in its beautiful poetry. This beloved psalm was, until just a few years ago, something most Christians knew by heart.

“Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” In our day, “comfort” generally means something warm and reassuring like a “comforter” or “comfort food”. In the 11th Century Bayeux Tapestry, a scene is portrayed with the words “Bishop Odo comforts the troops.” Bishop Odo, who was a political and military leader as well as a bishop, is depicted with a club among his soldiers on their horses, rallying them in the midst of the battle.

“Comfort” here means something wider than what we usually mean. “Fortify” (notice the similarity) is more like it for Bishop Odo. Could the “rod and staff” of the Good Shepherd be seen in this way? Perhaps in our prayer and reflection we can sense Jesus both reassuring us as we seek to patiently endure these stay at home days and also rallying us with strength to follow him into the days that will come next.



Closing Prayer:

Almighty God, you desire good things for all your children; bless us with the comforting embrace of your Son, The Good Shepherd, whose voice we recognize and heed. Help us to follow Jesus in times of confusion and disorientation, and let us not be afraid in these days of great challenge. Give us a shepherd's heart so that we, feeling compassion for the needy, may be compelled to

use our voices to advocate for the poor and marginalized; this we ask in Christ's name. Amen.

Take a moment now for silent reflection. Think of the people and things that cause you worry or concern; think of the things for which you are grateful. Raise them up in prayer using the words our Savior Christ taught us:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, and the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Grace:

In this Easter Season, we delight in the joy and power of the Resurrection. We have peered into the tomb, touched the wounds of Christ, walked the road to Emmaus, and heard the Lord's voice calling us by name. God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, we praise you; Christ, Redeemer and Savior, we praise you; Holy Spirit and Advocate, we praise you! We lift our voices, rejoicing in the eternal life Christ has won for us—Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Use your parish directory this week as a prayer tool. Pray for five or ten members by name each day. As the sheep know their master's voice, use your own to offer prayer for the members, staff, clergy, and volunteers of your own worship community.



Each Sunday at 10 a.m., Bishop Sean and other leaders from WNY and NWPA will lead worship via the Zoom platform. Anyone can join the service via phone by calling **646-876-9923** use **code 127336938#**. Those wishing to join by instead of video can use this link: <https://zoom.us/j/127336938> If you are asked for a password, use **lakeerie**.

Simple Prayer, Simple Praise is produced for The Episcopal Dioceses of NWPA and WNY by the Rev. Steve Lane and the Rev. Claudia Scheda, and guest contributors as noted. May 2020.