

Teddington Circuit Worship at Home Sheets

Sunday 3rd May 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use as you are unable to attend church. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you. With thanks to Nick White and the Connexional team for the content.

Opening Prayer

Jesus said: 'I am the Good Shepherd'. Lord, help me to listen for his voice offering comfort and safety.

Hymn: I heard the voice of Jesus say (Singing the Faith 248

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqF4N7rdV-w>

I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down
your head upon my breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad,
I found in him a resting-place,
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down and drink and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'I am this dark world's Light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk,
till travelling days are done.

Horatius N. Bonar (1808-1889)

Let us pray together

Glory to God, creator of heaven and earth, who has made all things living.
Glory to God, Father of all mercies, who has given his only-begotten son to be our Redeemer.
Glory to God, fire of holy love, who for our sanctification has poured forth his life-giving Spirit.

John Hamilton (1512-1571) from Prayer Handbook 2019-2020 Day

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Today's Reading from the Old Testament Psalm 23

Today's Gospel Reading: John 10:1-18

Time to Reflect

My family enjoy visiting Woburn Safari Park. It's a lovely day out, seeing all the animals. In the dangerous areas, there are iron gates to protect those outside from the animals. So when Jesus said "I am the gate", was He protecting people outside from the sheep? Or was He saying He protects the sheep from people outside? Or did He mean both?

We are all currently in what is described as "Lockdown". Stay Home! Save Lives! There are three major purpose of the lockdown. To protect us from catching the virus. And to protect other people outside from catching the virus from us, if we already have it. And of course to ensure the NHS can cope with all the people who contract the virus.

And so we are "gated". Confined to our homes with no-one allowed over the threshold. Now Jesus said "I am the gate". Like a gate that protects those inside and those outside, Jesus was saying He wants to protect us from things in the world that might harm us. It was an ideal description of Himself, talking to people who knew about sheep and gates.

This was one of the great "I am" sayings. "I am" was the name of God. Jahweh. It was never spoken. In front of Caiaphas, it was the phrase that condemned Jesus. "Are you the Son of God?" "I am", Jesus said, and Caiaphas tore his robe in anguish.

The image of Jesus as a shepherd fits well with the Sunday School pictures of Jesus. But what does a "good" shepherd mean? How can He be a good shepherd and a gate?

You might think being a shepherd is easy - sitting out on the hillside, admiring the stars. But being a shepherd in Palestine 2000 years ago was not like that at all. It was hard. The Judean plateau from Bethel to Hebron was about 35 miles long by 15 miles wide. It was rough and stony. If a flock grazed without a shepherd, they would starve. And there were no protecting hedges or fences, so the sheep had to be constantly watched.

The flocks of sheep were not divided, so they often got mixed up with other flocks. The shepherd therefore had to know and recognise every one of his sheep. And he had to teach them his voice, so that when he called, they came to him.

The story is told of two flocks sheltering in the same cave overnight near Bethlehem. In the morning, one flock's shepherd went to the cave and called his sheep out. Only his sheep came - because they knew his voice. Hence Jesus could say, "The sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out."

Today's shepherds are behind their sheep. The Palestinian shepherd led his sheep. There were wolves to look out for, and hyenas, so it was a dangerous 24x7 job. For some there was physical danger. Many lost their lives defending their sheep. Vigilance, courage, patience and love were the qualities of a good shepherd.

Some people didn't shepherd their own flock. They hired other people to do it for them. The trouble was that when danger came, hirelings looked after themselves and ran. They were shepherds. But they weren't good shepherds. They were bad shepherds. That's why Jesus needed to say "I am the good shepherd", not just any old shepherd.

The word "good" here in the Bible translates from a Greek word "Kalos". It means more than just technically capable, qualified, competent, and experienced. "Kalos" good means sympathetic, reliable, kind, loving and gracious.

Like the doctors of old, who were friends of the family for life, not just doctors. Some of you may remember the "good" Doctor Finlay on television.

So Jesus said "I am the Kalos shepherd", i.e. I'm not just a technically capable shepherd. I'm one who loves his sheep and is kind and patient. I'm a good shepherd and more. For He also said, "I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves. Whoever comes in by me will be saved. He will come in, and go out, and find pasture."

A gate is useful for protecting those inside from danger outside. Like the lockdown. And it's useful for protecting those outside from those inside, for example prison gates.

A gate can also have another benefit. It can protect those inside from temptation. Being "gated" is a punishment used for those at boarding school or

university. It means they stay in the grounds for a time, for their own good to avoid misbehaviour.

Good gates not only shut, but they also open at the right time, when it is safe. The Hillsborough tragedy arose from opening a gate at the wrong time.

In the villages and towns of Palestine in those days, there were communal sheepfolds, where all the village flocks were sheltered when they returned home at night.

The sheepfolds were protected by a gate, and only the gatekeeper had a key. This was a shut gate of the good variety. It protected the sheep.

But the sheep out on the hills in the warm season did not return at night. They did not go to the village sheepfold. They stayed on the hillside. They were gathered into open spaces enclosed by a wall, which had an opening, where the sheep came in and went out. But there was no gate across the opening. So at night the shepherd lay across the opening, so that no sheep could get out. And no-one else could get in either. If thieves came, they had to get past him.

So the good shepherd was there at night for protection in two ways. Quite literally, the shepherd was the gate. And a good gate at that.

Jesus' listeners would have understood all this about shepherds and gates clearly. They knew that people who did not come in via the gate were up to no good. They were likely to be thieves and robbers, coming to steal kill and destroy.

But there was more to being a good shepherd than providing protection during the night. In the morning the shepherd got up, thus opening the gate, and found new pasture. In Palestine, this was not straightforward. Only the shepherd knew where to go.

When you set out on a journey through unknown territory, you need a guide. Someone who knows what you need and how to find it. Like pasture for sheep. Jesus cares for us as His flock and He is the gateway to the new life in Him. He is the good shepherd who knows what you need in life and where to find it.

So how can Jesus be our gate today? Not just when we are in a social lockdown.

In business, when a decision has to be made, a "Gate" document is often produced. The document helps a gatekeeper decide whether to allow a project to proceed.

When we have to make tough decisions in life, Jesus should be our gatekeeper.

But this must not make us feel that Jesus wants to keep people out of his sheepfold. Exclusive clubs attract criticism. They can be seen as divisive, superior, snobbish. Gated communities in America attract resentment, jealousy and animosity.

This was never how Jesus saw it. His vision was universal. He also said: "There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them in, too. They will listen to my voice, and will become one flock."

The ultimate vision of His ministry on Earth was one flock and one shepherd. A good shepherd and a good gate that welcomes people in, protects them, and at the right time and in the right place leads them out to green pastures.

When Jesus said, "I am the gate", He knew it meant He would be going to the cross. His sacrifice as the gate, enabled Him to lead us through sin and death to eternal life.

We can try to be gates, and good shepherds too, for the flock we care for in life. So let us try to protect them and enable them to find a life of fulfilment with Jesus.

With every blessing

Amen

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

Let us pray for our world in crisis, a crisis that has brought out the best and the worst in humanity:

We give thanks for those who are offering help in so many ways to those in need; and pray for those who in their fear acted less generously.

We give thanks for all the 'key workers' who have worked tirelessly in medical and care sectors; Local

Authority and community teams; production and distribution; and pray for those now idle, anxious, and depressed due to the closures.

We give thanks for positive voices, encouraging and nurturing others in so many ways; and pray for those whose voices bring 'fake' advice and false testimony.

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 made whole'
and lead us, that we may be with you;
for you are alive and reign,
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen;

Collect for Fourth Sunday of Easter
from Methodist Worship book.

The Lord's Prayer
Our Father

Hymn: Listen to 'You are my keeper'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FGQLbGiUpQ>

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

A prayer of blessing

I come into your sheep-fold this day, to find the rest I need. When the new day comes, I will follow you through green pastures and beside still waters. May your goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life. Amen.

Original Materials by Pamela Cram