

Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon

Sunday 11 October 2020

Order of Service for Worship At Home



Led by the Revd Alistair Cumming

Over the coming weeks and months our worship in church will be led by some old and new friends, as well as our own Elders and members.

We won't be able to livestream these services, not for a little while at least, and so we have put together an online service, made up of our own recordings and others [in a Youtube playlist](#).

Videos should play automatically one after the other, but if you get out of sync you can find the links in the transcript below.

[Click here to begin the service.](#)

Gathering in God's presence

Call to worship

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in whom I trust. (Psalm 91:1-2).

Hymn

The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
Thy unction, grace bestoweth:
And O what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.

H.W. Baker (1821-77)

Prayers of approach and confession

Almighty Lord our God,
you have put eternity into the heart of us all
that we might know in our inmost being that you are God.
Heavenly Father we offer our worship
for you are our creator God,
beside you there is no other.

Lord of all creation,
we hold you in wonder as being above the power of the nations,
as just and holy, as wise and gracious.
As the holy God before whom all nations and peoples shall bow,
we rejoice in your great mercy,
that you have favoured us in your love.
The most precious gift of Your Son humbles and uplifts us.

In our journey of faith
we seek to more fully grasp the wonder of your love.
You have blessed us in Christ in every way.
We praise you for the death and resurrection of our Lord,
and marvel at all that he bore for us.

Our gracious Father in heaven,
Draw near to us this day and bless us as a body of your people.
Again we ask you to forgive our sins,
Sins which are known and unknown,
Sins which are remembered and forgotten.

Almighty and forgiving Lord you see us as we are.
For you there is no blind spot
For you there are no hidden agendas
From you there is only Love.
Set within us a clean heart and a clean mind that we may worship you with
all that we are.

Take us afresh and put within us such a great desire to know you
that our lives are transformed;
that through the working of the Spirit of Christ within us
we may more fully know the freedom
which Christ has given us
and that we may become more like Christ in thought, word and deed.
May our attitude be the same as that of Jesus himself.
May the mind of Christ dwell in us.
Grant that we may walk in his light
And show forth your glory to the world
Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Use either of these forms, or a different version/language if you prefer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be
done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive
those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

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

Listening to God's Word

Bible Reading: Psalm 23

- 1** The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- 2** He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
- 3** he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
- 4** Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
- 5** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- 6** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Hymn

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want:
he makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.
My soul he doth restore again,
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
ev'n for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me, and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnished
in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me;
and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be.

Psalm 23

Metrical version by William Whittingham (1524-79) altd.

Bible Reading: Matthew 22: 1-14

1 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: **2** "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. **3** He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. **4** Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.'" **5** But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, **6** while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. **7** The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. **8** Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. **9** Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.'" **10** Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, **12** and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. **13** Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." **14** For many are called, but few are chosen."

Sermon

I would like to start by asking you to think about this question for a second or two.

Why is the metaphor of sheep and shepherd so appropriate to our relationship with God?

References to shepherd appear throughout the bible, the first reference being in Genesis and the last in the book of Revelation.

The content of Psalm 23 are very familiar words to many people, words used on many occasions from times of great fear, times of great sadness and also times of great Joy.

My late father was infuriated that on attending funerals at various crematorium the hymn books always fell open at that page.

Psalm 23 is in great danger of becoming only of sentimental value to people. Have we, as he used to say, ceased to think of what the words mean and think more of the occasions that we use them?

Yet because it is so familiar and often of sentimental value we must be careful not to go to the other extreme and rarely use it or speak of it at all.

It is a great and powerful Psalm.

God is not referred to in the psalm as a King sitting in a palace to rule over His people from some distant or majestic place while we run around aimlessly trying to get by as best we can. Feeling sorry for ourselves when things don't go our way.

David calls God a Shepherd.

Shepherds are unique in their profession because they don't, like those factory workers punch a time clock.

They don't live separate lives from the sheep they watch over!

Shepherds ate, slept, walked, fought, and lived right along side the sheep. Where he went they went, and where they went he went!

Many of us will have seen that relationship in person when we recall the old TV Programme "one man and his dog". Now brought back once a year in Countryfile. That series has brought the work of the shepherd into our lounges.

The shepherd was out on the hillsides, from steep escarpments to low valleys, in all weathers, his care was only for the sheep. Not for himself. Calling on his team of dogs to round up the sheep, prevent them from straying and bring them to him in order that he could safely look after them in his pen.

In the time of David, shepherds would gather their sheep into pens at night. The walls of the sheepfolds were about five feet high and were made out of rocks. Often, briars or thorny branches were placed on top of the walls. All this was done to keep the wolves and mountain lions from getting to the sheep at night.

The gate to the sheepfold was about two feet wide. It was not made of rocks or wood or sticks laced together. No. There was no gate.

One of the shepherds was literally the gate. The shepherd would sleep there in the small, narrow opening of the rock wall. He would sleep there by the fire, with his staff.

We are familiar with the image of the staff, we often refer to it as the shepherd's crook, the hook being there to help lift the sheep out of danger when they become trapped.

And if a wolf would show up to try and get to the sheep, the shepherd would fight it off with his staff or with a short club, called his rod.

A king might know his citizen's needs ... but he might forget them or ignore them while busying himself in his own palace ... but a shepherd cannot ignore his sheep, he lives with them, experiences everything they do, foregoes the luxuries of a king for the difficulties of life with sheep!

The shepherd would risk injury - would risk sacrificing his very life - on behalf of the sheep.

The shepherd didn't just guard the gate. The shepherd was the gate. The shepherd controlled who came in.

Many people would run away if they saw a wolf approaching. But a good shepherd stayed right there, as the gate, and was willing to lay his life down for the sheep.

In the book, "A shepherd looks at psalm 23" the author Phillip Keller, himself a shepherd, describes the fact that sheep need 4 things before they will lie down.

It is the shepherd's job to try and bring these four things;

Due to sheep's timidity, they must be free of all fear ... hence quiet waters.

Due to their sociability, they must be free from friction with other sheep. They must also be free of parasites and flies in order to relax. They must be free from hunger before they can relax and lie down. Shepherds provide the framework for the entire needs of sheep in everyday life, in all weathers and all situations.

Protection from enemies.

Guide to find proper food.

Security and sense of well-being.

Leading to adequate supplies of water.

Knowledge about dangers while travelling.

The sense of greater power to handle the unknown.

The knowledge that life is not lived alone or without purpose.

A sheep can only see about 6 feet in front of itself but when trusting and being led by the shepherd it will remain content.

I think you can probably see where I am coming from. When we are in times of danger, times of fear we often think of the 23rd Psalm. We are seeking reassurance.

We are those sheep seeking the comfort of our shepherd.

The Lord is my Shepherd. He is there. If I place my trust in him, I will surely want for nothing.

I recall only too vividly in the aftermath of the horrific events in London on the 7 July 2005. I was told by several Police officers engaged in some very difficult tasks that some of the injured were reciting the 23rd Psalm as they were waiting to be rescued. It had stuck with those officers.

I do not know if those people referred to were Christians or had any faith, but they were seeking their shepherd to guide them away from danger. To protect them, to give security and well-being.

Are we more likely to call out to our shepherd only when we need his help or do we place our trust in Him all of the time and not just at those more unpleasant times.

The Shepherd is there for his sheep in good times as well as bad, in happy as well as sad.

Some people hold a view that an unbeliever has no right to say this psalm. It is, in their opinion, only for those who can really say the Lord is MY shepherd.

I cannot agree with that view.

The word 'Lord' in the Psalm is a translation of the word Jehovah in the Hebrew Bible and that word was the word that was used for the personal name of God. There are other words in Hebrew used for God, But Jehovah is emphasising the commitment of God to his people. That is all people.

Like the Shepherd is committed to his sheep, and if he finds an injured or lost one he brings it to his fold. God has made a commitment to his people to be their Shepherd and he promised never to leave them or forsake them.

It was the Lord who made this commitment, his love for people was such that he committed himself to us in spite of our failures and weaknesses. One of my favourite hymns is I will sing the wondrous story, and the line "I was lost but Jesus found me, found the sheep that went astray, took my hand and gently led me, led me to a better day".

The shepherd is most certainly there for all of his sheep. For everyone not the select few.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life..."

There can be no better conclusion than this.

How long can we expect this goodness and mercy? "All the days of my life!"

No matter what that life throws at us, no matter how we have been affected by Covid, no matter how harshly done by we feel, no matter if we deal in fact or try and look at assumptions and supposition, God will be, God is, with us all of the time.

Whether it be as individuals or as a community we feel torn apart, when in our darkest days, we can still expect to find Gods mercy

How do we respond to this?

"I will dwell in the house of the lord ... forever!"

This is a powerful Psalm! It shows God's love and care for us in our past, present, and future

In all the circumstances of our lives God's presence and care will manifest itself.

God is not just a king ruling from a palace ... He is the shepherd living with His sheep!

Whether through the green pastures, the still waters, through the valley of death, or in the presence of those who will try to harm us. He is always there.

The Lord is my Shepherd and I will trust in Him. You can too.

Responding to God's grace

Prayer of Intercession

Lord we pray for our suffering world as the seemingly never-ending battle against Coronavirus continues. We pray particularly for all those under local lockdowns: for those whose livelihood and future are at risk; those anxious for the safety of family members or feeling isolated and alone; those working as key workers in the NHS, in food retail and delivery, in charities including our local foodbanks and shelters, in our school, transport and justice systems, for their safety, positivity and perseverance through the winter ahead. We pray most of all for all families with members unwell or in hospital for recovery and convalescence as soon as possible, and for those bereaved for peace, reassurance and faith that you, as in all things, can be our salvation, hope and strength both in this life and in the days beyond.

We pray for areas of the world where there is violence and unrest on top of this current international crisis; for political warfare in Armenia and Azerbaijan, ongoing tensions in Israel and Palestine, and protests against governments in Nigeria and Sudan. We are all your servants placed on this Earth by you; please help us to treat each other with love and kindness for the short duration of our lives, as surely as you taught us to love all our neighbours as ourselves.

We pray for our church here at Trinity as we begin a new period without a minister. Please provide our leaders and elders with the time, expertise, wisdom and opportunities to sustain our worship, mission and church family in the months ahead, and please guide our new future minister, wherever they may be, towards us soon, yet according to your will. We pray particularly that despite all the restrictions, our services might still celebrate your love and the joy that comes from faith in you; and that we might use the opportunities online to grow our church family with new members, and help to make our faith community a strong, compassionate and welcoming place to belong.

We pray with deep thanks for all the many memories and fellowship of our years under Dominic's ministry. The special services, musicals, Christmases, social events, prayer groups and visiting speakers we have shared in and enjoyed. May those days yet come again, and may Dominic, Miriam and Matt stay safe, happy and powerful messengers of your word and work as they begin a new stage in their lives with their new churches.

Finally, we remember that every one of us needs your love, guidance and support alongside us every moment of our lives. We pray for everyone known to us who needs you right now, whether at school or away studying, elderly alone or in care homes, abroad around the world, in hospital, in isolation or in distress. We think of those people now, and know that with faith all things are possible in you.

We pray all these things in Your name, and the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who reigns with you, this day and always.

Amen

Offertory

This is an opportunity to set aside your regular financial contribution to Trinity's ongoing work and witness. You might like to put it in a jar for now, ready to be brought in person when circumstances allow. Then say the prayer below (if you already participate in Trinity's Planned Giving scheme via direct bank transfer, then simply recite the prayer – no need for a jar!)

Generous God, your gift to me
is life, and sustenance, and hope.
I bring to you my gift, and myself.
Receive, Lord, and bless:
so that both gift and giver
may bring blessing to others,
and glory to your name. Amen.

Hymn

Guide me, O Thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,
hold me with Thy pow'rful hand:
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me till I want no more;
Feed me till I want no more.

Open thou the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be Thou still my strength and shield;
be Thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's Destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

v.1 tr. Peter Williams (1722-96) altd.

vv.2-3 tr. William Williams (or John Williams, 1754-1828) altd.

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Wherever you may be today
may you know the love and the peace of God
your shepherd.
And the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you and all those whom you love
this day and forever more.
Amen.

*Bible passages: New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995
the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United
States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*