

**Worship for 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (complete text. A video version is also online)**  
**Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

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*'Welcome to worship with us here in South Warwickshire. We are delighted to have a number of people leading us in our worship again. All of our church buildings remain closed, but we have been allowed to open them for one or two activities that support the most vulnerable across our community in these testing times. You might like to pray for Kenilworth sewing group that are using the hall at Kenilworth Church to make PPE for use by local hospital and nursing home staff. Four people sewing at any one time, one in each corner of the church hall to keep a safe distance. At Stratford the Talking Newspaper continues to use the premises to produce their weekly news to send out to those who are blind and partially sighted in the community. Stratford has also become the host of the town Food Bank as the premises are more readily suited to offer that ministry safely.'. If any of you would like to take part, then please get in touch with me on [revpeter.mwc@gmail.com](mailto:revpeter.mwc@gmail.com)*

THE PREPARATION

*Call to worship*

Come as you are to worship – known and loved.  
Come with joy, come with hope.  
Come with your burdens, come with your doubts.  
Come with your dreams, come with your fears.  
Come as you are to worship – known and loved.  
**Amen.**

StF 481: The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want  
(Townend)

- 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.**

***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.**

***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.***

- 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**

***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.***

*Prayer of approach*

God of teeming galaxies and the great empty  
freeways of space,  
Shepherd of the meek,  
**we approach you with loving awe.**

God of mother earth, of sunlit mountains and  
moonlit lakes,  
Shepherd of the poor,  
**we approach you with loving gratitude.**

God of countless millennia and the rise and fall  
of cultures and empires,  
Shepherd of the merciful,  
**we approach you with loving faith.**

God of incarnation and redemption, of the dying  
and rising Christ,

Shepherd of the lost,  
**we approach you with loving hope.**

As we worship you,  
open our minds to your life,  
our souls to your beauty,  
and our hearts to your grace.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord  
**Amen!**

*Prayer of confession*

Let us come to God, trusting the tireless mercy  
which always awaits us.

Let us pray.

God our most holy Friend, we come before you  
as wanderers longing to come home to familiar  
ground and saving grace.  
Lord have mercy.  
**Lord have mercy.**

We come compromised from seeking a living in a  
ruthless world, in need of facing our failures and  
regaining our bearings.  
Christ have mercy.  
**Christ have mercy.**

We come seeking that shepherd-love that gave  
Mary Magdalene back her sanity, Zacchaeus back  
his self-respect, Peter a second chance, and Paul  
a totally new life.  
Lord have mercy.  
**Lord have mercy.**

And now, holy Friend, please lift us out of our  
pre-occupation with our own needs  
**Allow us to trust you with all that is past and to  
commit to you all that is to come.**

Make us joyful in all the goodness we have  
received from your hands.  
**And let us seek the same grace and joy for those  
who live and work beside us.**

Create in us a new gratitude for all people who  
are loving, true and gentle.

**Awaken in us a longing for the qualities of  
Christ Jesus**

Please make us aware of the mighty crowd of  
people surrounding us, both past and present,  
and all those who are yet to come, who trust,  
love and worship you, world without end.  
**Through Christ Jesus our Saviour. Amen!**

*Declaration of forgiveness*

Family of the Most High God, by the priceless  
mercy of Christ we are a new breed, forgiven and  
restored to declare the wonderful works of the  
God who brings us out of darkness into light.  
**Thanks be to God!**

*Collect for 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter*

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  
forever.  
**Amen.**

StF 62 – Our God is an awesome God

**Our God is an awesome God,  
who reigns from heaven above,  
with wisdom, power and love,  
our God is an awesome God!**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

*Psalm 23*

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,<sup>[a]</sup>  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.

*Epistle*      *1 Peter 2:19-25*

<sup>19</sup>For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. <sup>20</sup>But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup>To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

<sup>22</sup>“He committed no sin,  
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

<sup>23</sup>When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup>“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” <sup>25</sup>For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

*Gospel*      *John 10 v 1-10*

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him

because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger’s voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore, Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

*Sermon*

Today’s Gospel reading follows a long argument about the healing of a blind man, in which Jesus talks about ‘blind guides’ and plays with the idea of ‘seeing’ as both vision and understanding. Today’s discussion, about gates and shepherds, is similarly confusing, but leaves us with two clear metaphors: a gate and a shepherd.

Despite the cuteness of new-born lambs, shepherding is not an attractive job. In poor communities across the world, tiny flocks are watched by children or grannies under a merciless sun; larger flocks may be led very long distances in a summer season by families who travel with them, sharing their drinking water at streams and sleeping in tents or huts.

In this country our image of sheep herding probably involves dogs and whistles. But in eastern Mediterranean countries – in the time of Jesus, and still in many places today! – it is quite different. There are no field boundaries or hedges, no dogs – and sometimes not much grass. So the shepherd has to take the sheep constantly just to find good or suitable grass. And he does it not by herding from behind, but by leading from the front. The sheep follow,

heads down and nibbling as they go. They don't even need to look up, they need only the occasional word from the shepherd to keep on the right track. Each night, as the sun goes down, the sheep are put into a large pen, usually with strong stone walls to keep thieves and wolves out, and just a small gate where the shepherds can lie down to block the way – and quite literally become the gate. In the morning, each shepherd calls his sheep – who recognise his particular voice, and are ready to follow him on another day's trek in the hills.

It's not easy being called sheep. Sheep have become the symbol, in our culture, of mindless compliance with social norms. Even if you're comfortable with compliance, there's also the bald fact that, as stated by the farmer in a classic Monty Python television sketch, "Sheep are very dim."

Jesus, however, seems to credit sheep with a good deal more sense – in any case, with the one important sense of knowing their shepherd's voice. Important not because the sheep are followers in their essence, but because they are wanderers by nature. And sensible not because the sheep are dim enough to follow any voice, but discerning enough to follow only the right voice. That discerning ear matters because the sheep are facing real dangers, from without and from within.

Jesus promises that with the Lord as our shepherd, we will "come in and go out and find pasture." Outside the fold, sheep are under threat from predators. The shepherd's rod and staff are not only comfort, but protection. But the biggest risk comes from the sheep themselves – they are apt to wander off, each to its own way. God our Providence promises to sustain us, but it's hard for us to believe in God's abundance. Instead, we are constantly scouting for greener pastures, imagining that we do not have enough by God's hand. "Prone to wander,

Lord, I feel it," writes Robert Robinson in his hymn that names God the "fount of every blessing."

Jesus, however, seems especially concerned about dangers inside the sheepfold. Even in our place of shelter and rest, thieves may come in to steal and kill and destroy. Some slip over the walls and whisper to us that our Easter hope is misguided, that we truly are following blindly, that death, after all, will have the final word. Some thieves call to us from outside, telling us that our shelter is a prison and that we'd do better to leave behind our false sense of security.

Then, sometimes, our own wandering hearts tempt us in the same way, giving us false hope that there's an easier path to transcendence, without all the work and uncertainty of transformation by the grace of God. In that same Monty Python sketch, a visitor to the farm is shocked to see sheep up in the trees – nesting, - as the farmer tells him. The sheep are also trying to fly, convinced by a sheep named Howard that they are, in fact, birds. The farmer explains that Howard is "that most dangerous of all animals: the clever sheep."

Perhaps we, too, are trying to be too clever. And wouldn't it be easier if we could just take wing? If our human natures were merely an illusion, waiting to be cast off? If we didn't need to be patient followers, trusting beyond our immediate desires?

If we didn't need to suffer the indignities of our limitations, and if we weren't called to ease the sufferings of our neighbours? Wouldn't it be easier if our shepherd and saviour didn't first have to suffer death upon the cross, before he entered into heaven?

In the eyes of the world, we may seem foolish to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. A thousand competing voices call to us that we should look for escape instead of sacrifice, should seek an

easier bliss than the peace of God, should search for our own greener pastures and leave the rest of the flock behind. Christ crucified is still a stumbling block, still looks like foolishness to many. Why would we worship a God who became like us, who died as one of the lambs?

But Jesus doesn't call us to become something different; he calls us to grow into who we truly are. The Good Shepherd doesn't round up the sheep with a whistle, or herd them with whips and prods and dogs. The Good Shepherd calls the sheep by name.

In the end, our only wisdom is to know our shepherd's voice. Our one skill as sheep is to listen – to listen from the deep place in which we recognize who we truly are, and whose we truly are. Because the Good Shepherd is the only one who calls us by our own names, our true names, our Created names.

It's still not easy to be called sheep. But it's our blessing, our safety, our abundance, to be sheep who are called – called each by name.

StF 418 – We have a gospel to proclaim

- 1. We have a gospel to proclaim,  
good news for all throughout the earth;  
the gospel of a Saviour's name:  
we sing his glory, tell his worth**
- 2. Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -  
not in a royal house or hall,  
but in a stable dark and dim,  
the Word made flesh, a light for all.**
- 3. Tell of his death at Calvary:  
hated by those he came to save,  
in lonely suffering on the cross,  
for all he loved his life he gave.**
- 4. Tell of that glorious Easter morn:  
empty the tomb, for he was free.  
He broke the power of death and hell  
that we might share his victory.**

**5. Tell of his reign at God's right hand,  
by all creation glorified.**

**He sends his Spirit on his Church  
to live for him, the Lamb who died**

**6. Now we rejoice to name him King:  
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.**

**This gospel-message we proclaim:  
we sing his glory, tell his worth**

THE RESPONSE

*Prayers of thanksgiving*

Let us give thanks to God

For the love of our father, the maker of all, the  
giver of all good things:

Let us bless the Lord,

**Thanks be to God**

For the world's beauty and the changing seasons,  
for the signs of new life in nature and the power  
images of sheep and lambs.:

Let us bless the Lord,

**Thanks be to God**

For Jesus Christ our saviour, who lived and  
worked among us,

Let us bless the Lord,

**Thanks be to God**

For His suffering and death on the cross and His  
resurrection to new life, for the hope we have in  
crisis,

Let us bless the Lord,

**Thanks be to God**

For His rule over all things and His presence in  
the world and our lives,

Let us bless the Lord,

**Thanks be to God**

For the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who teaches  
and guides us for the lessons we are learning of  
mutual support:

Let us bless the Lord,

**Thanks be to God**

For the grace of the Spirit in the work of the church *scattered or gathered* and the life of the world:

Let us bless the Lord,

**Thanks be to God**

**Amen**

StF 707 – Make me a channel of your peace

- 1. Make me a channel of your peace.**  
**Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;**  
**where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;**  
**and where there's doubt, true faith in you:**

*O Master, grant that I may never seek  
so much to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be love as to love with all my soul.*

- 2. Make me a channel of your peace.**  
**Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;**  
**where there is darkness, only light;**  
**and where there's sadness, ever joy:**

*O Master, grant that I may never seek  
so much to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be love as to love with all my soul.*

- 3. Make me a channel of your peace.**  
**It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,**  
**in giving unto all that we receive,**  
**and in dying that we're born to eternal life.**

*Prayers of intercession*

And now we bring the needs of others and ourselves to God praying for all the sheep in our Lord's flock and those who shepherd them.

Let us pray:

God, most gracious and most holy,  
Grant us the help of your Spirit as we pray for  
the church and the world.

We pray for the church in every land. Today remembering our partners in the gospel in Benin, Cote D'Ivoire, and Togo particularly our mission partners in Togo, Michael and Joanna Tettey and their children. And in this country we name the South East District.

For the church where you normally worship picturing in your mind those you gather with on a Sunday and all our sister churches in South Warwickshire. May our churches have open gates welcoming all who seek God's green pastures.

That we may worship you and serve you with reverence and joy.

Lord hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for the peoples of the world, for the many suffering during this COVID 19 pandemic physically and the strain that isolation and restrictions puts on mental health and relationships.

For the leaders of the nations that giving thanks for our prime minister's recovery and return to work and pray that he and all leaders may have wisdom in finding and enforcing policies that will bring health and well-being, justice and peace for all citizens.

Lord hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who are ill or distressed asking that you help folks overcome fear and anxiety to seek medical help and advice. For those whose treatment is delayed during this pandemic. We pray for all carers professional and voluntary and those who care for family members and near neighbours.

We pray for those who are bereaved and unable to celebrate the life of a loved one in the company of family and friends. We pray for

those involved in the practicalities of funerals at this stressful time.

Lord hear us,  
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Father, we remember before you all your servants who have died in the faith of Christ. We pray that we too may lead faithful and godly lives in this world and finally share with all the saints in everlasting joy;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

*The Lord's Prayer*

We say the Lord's prayer:

**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 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**

*The Offering & prayer*

Many of us make bring our gifts and offerings through standing orders, through charitable gifts that we make, giving our time and our availability, our care and our compassion. We offer all we give as part of this worship this morning.

We say together:  
**Gracious God, accept these gifts, and with them our lives to be used in your service; through Jesus Christ our lord.  
Amen**

THE DISMISSAL

StF 459 – Captain of Israel's host and guide

- 1. Captain of Israel's host, and Guide of all who seek the land above, beneath your shadow we abide, the cloud of your protecting love; our strength, your grace; our rule, your word; our end, the glory of the Lord.**
- 2. By your unerring Spirit led, we shall not in the desert stray; we shall not full direction need, nor miss our providential way; as far from danger as from fear, while love, almighty love, is near.**

*Prayer & blessing*

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen us to walk with him in his risen life; and may almighty God bless us the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen**