

## Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2021 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

*Today's worship for the third Sunday after Easter is based on the powerful image of The Good Shepherd from John 10: 1-10.*

### Call to worship

Jesus says, 'I am the gate.'  
Come, and be loved.  
Come, and receive peace.  
Come, and find life.

### A prayer of approach

We come to you, O God, in penitence for what we have done.  
We come to you in anticipation for what you offer to us.  
We come to you in hope,  
for we know you will give us abundant life.

**Amen.**

### A prayer of confession

Generous God, you offer us abundant life, yet we ask for more;  
you offer us security and sanctuary, yet we seek our own way – despite the risks;  
you offer us guidance and direction, and we ignore you and take our own way.  
We are sorry for our ingratitude.  
We are sorry for our arrogance.  
We are sorry that we think we know best.

**Forgive us, renew us and restore us to abundant life in you,  
in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

**Amen.**

***Our Father .....***

**Song     Jesus Christ I think upon your sacrifice (Once again) Matt Redmond with lyrics:**

[\(479\) Matt Redman - Once Again \[with lyrics\] - YouTube](#)

### John 10: 11-18 – The Good Shepherd

<sup>11</sup> 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> 'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice,



and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.’ (NIVUK)

### **The Good Shepherd – Our Protector**

In John 10: 11-18 no childhood pastoral images will do justice to the themes of threat and death running throughout – themes that may be well understood from the perspectives of vulnerable, fearful or violated people who may help us hear these words afresh.

Now there is nothing wrong with an image of Jesus tenderly holding a small lamb in his arms, as I used in this service sheet. He gave as plenty of reasons to see him as both tender and nurturing. But I’m not sure that tender nurturing cuddles with fluffy white lambs really does justice to the image of the “Good Shepherd”.

When we look at the actual passages of scripture on ‘the good shepherd,’ they are not all cuddles and loveliness. Even in Psalm 23 we read of walking through the valley of death and finding in God a presence that enables us to overcome the fear that rises up in us in such a place. Perhaps it’s different for you, but for me it takes more than a cuddle to overcome my fear in the valley of death. In the valley of death, I want the presence of someone who can stand without flinching and take the worst that death can dish up but still come out on top. Here, it looks as if it is Jesus who fits that description.

In verse 11 and are told straight away that “the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” So right up front we are talking about life and death situations, not just cuddling cute lambs. The image of the flock of sheep that operates in this chapter is an image of a group in danger. There are wolves prowling about in the darkness waiting for an opportunity and there are thieves who will steal sheep if the shepherd lets down his guard. The only hope for the sheep in the midst of all this danger is the shepherd. And so Jesus is saying, when real danger threatens, you’d better have a reliable shepherd.

And what is Jesus’ idea of a reliable shepherd? One who will put the welfare and safety of the sheep before his own. One who will, should the unthinkable happen, give up his own life before he’d back down. Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, and I lay down my life for the sheep.”.

I am reminded of the first letter of John, “This is how we know what love is - Christ laid down his life for us.” Yes, true love expresses itself in tender cuddles and other gentle expressions of affection, but as we know only too well, not everyone who offers affectionate physical intimacy is truly loving. We’ve all heard of the wolf in sheep’s clothing! True love, while never devoid of displays of affection, is really known when the loved one is threatened with some danger.

The good shepherd is protector, willing to face wolves and to lay aside his own security for the sake of those in his care. That same perspective would connect Psalm 23 with its assurance that amid enemies and evil there is the possibility of goodness, mercy,

refreshment and restoration. It is peculiar to John's Gospel that we hear Jesus saying, 'I lay down my life in order to take it up again.'

'No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (10.17-18). The power of which Jesus speaks (10.18) is linked with the love of the Father (10.17) and with the command from the Father (10.18). Jesus is never other than human, even if also divine. What we have repeatedly in the Gospel of John are images of Jesus abiding in the Father, as his disciples (here, his sheep) abide in Jesus. There is an intimacy of commitment, love and belonging – ultimate protection.

### **Prayers of intercession**

Lord of life,  
as we begin to step out along the pathway of easing lockdown,  
be with us.  
Help us to take it slowly and carefully,  
heeding the encouragement to take care.  
We have shown love to our neighbour through the restrictions we have followed,  
may we not stop now.  
In our desire for 'normality' give us patience;  
let us not forget all that has been.  
May we act wisely, show mercy and live love.  
In Jesus' name we pray.

**Amen.**

By the Revd Jenny Mills, URC Secretary for Education & Learning

*Please add your prayers for others you wish to pray for today . . .*

**Hymn    The Lord's my Shepherd (Stuart Townend) video:**

[\(479\) The Lord's My Shepherd - Stuart Townend - YouTube](#)

### **Communion Thanksgiving Prayer – Good Shepherd**

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,  
for with you as our shepherd, we need nothing more.

Your promise has been fulfilled in your Son,  
Jesus of Nazareth,  
who showed us the fullness of love  
that lays down even its own life for others.  
He was crucified, but you raised him from the dead,  
and through his love we have the boldness to approach you.  
Because he abides in us,



and in all who listen to his voice,  
our cup overflows with goodness and love  
and our feet find safe paths leading to your house  
where we will live forever.

***Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,  
we offer you thanks and praise at all times  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.***

### **The Breaking of the Bread and Pouring of the Wine**

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast.  
1 Corinthians 5:7

### **The Sharing of the Bread and the Wine**

*The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ.  
The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.  
1 Corinthians 10:16*

Take, eat; this is the body of Christ, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of him.

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ, shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of him.

### **Prayer after communion**

Loving God, you have fed us generously at this table, as we have remembered Jesus and rejoiced that he is with us today. We are ready now to follow him, and to be your people in the world. May your Holy Spirit show us the way, make us holy and fill us with love.

### **Blessing**

Coming and going  
GOD WATCHES OVER US  
Resting and travelling  
GOD WATCHES OVER US  
Through good and through evil  
GOD WATCHES OVER US  
All the days of our lives  
GOD SAFEGUARDS US WITH LOVE



