



Connection

Sunday 25th April 2021
Fourth Sunday of Easter



Collect

Risen Christ,
faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep:
teach us to hear your voice
and to follow your command,
that all your people may be gathered into one flock,
to the glory of God the Father.

Amen

Reading: Acts 4: 5-12

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Reading: John 10: 11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ^{just} as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because 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. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

Post Communion Prayer

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection,
and give us grace to follow in his steps;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Reflection



The reflection this week is written by Mark Wild who is a reader in the Worcester West Rural Team, part of the Diocese of Worcester. To watch this sermon as a podcast please click on:

<https://www.cofe-worcester.org.uk/your-faith/prayer-worship/sermon-podcasts/easter-4.php>

Today's reading about Jesus being the good shepherd is a very familiar one and is often quoted as purely a description of Jesus. There is therefore a danger that the full significance of the whole reading and the context is overlooked. We are now moving away from Easter, the time when Christians concentrate on the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus. A story, the truth of which can be relied on, not just because of what Jesus' followers wrote, but also because of what Roman writers, who were looking at the events historically and who had no other agenda, wrote.

The passage today from John's Gospel provides some background to those events.

Jesus tells the people of the time not only about himself as being the shepherd of His people, but also that he would lay down His life voluntarily for his flock of sheep. To me, this indicates that He knew what was coming and yet He still carried on with His ministry. His death was not forced upon Him by circumstance, it was part of the plan. God the Son, the ultimate sacrifice to end all sacrifices, would do this voluntarily for the sake of saving His people.

The first few verses of this reading, identify the difference between a committed shepherd and a hired hand who was only there for his pay packet. The fact that Jesus was prepared to die for His sheep shows the level of His commitment. This was in contrast to the ways of the world at that time.

Being a shepherd could be dangerous, we read in the bible about wild animals roaming around including wolves, but the expectation was always that the shepherd would survive any attack. What would His motivation have been to do this, to sacrifice himself for His sheep?

The bible translation that I read when preparing this talk, when referring to the hired hand who was paid to look after the sheep, says that "The man runs away because he is a hired hand and **cares** nothing for the sheep". Jesus not only cares, but he is part of the God who loves the sheep.

Earlier in his gospel John writes “For God so loved the world that He gave is one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The word love is used in this passage in the context of the relationship between Jesus and the Heavenly Father. But it is also underlying the whole act of His sacrifice.

God loves His people enough to sacrifice His Son for them and Jesus being part of the Godhead, has the same love and does it voluntarily.

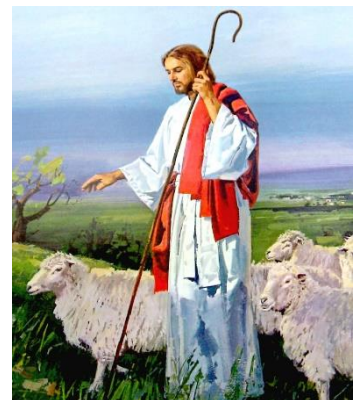
I think that now is the time when we need to look at just how that relates to you and me.

I have made two references to a collective gathering of people. In John’s gospel chapter 3 he refers to God loving the world and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, and in chapter 10 he refers to flocks of sheep.

A shepherd who is prepared to die for his sheep is going to know the flock intimately and each one as an individual.

We are His flock, I think that it is therefore right to say, bringing these two passages together, that He knows each one of us as an individual and that He would be prepared to die for each one of us, as an individual. Which I believe is what He did.

It was hearing, as part of a sermon one Easter Sunday many years ago that Jesus died for me as an individual, that changed my life. Until then, Jesus had died as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, but to hear that He had died as the sacrifice for my sins because He loved me that much, was something new and it altered my life totally.



Today’s passage also refers to a second flock of sheep and when read with Chapter 3 in John’s gospel, which refers to the whole world, we can be sure that all people, not just the Jewish race is part of God’s plan.

Up until this point, as far as the people who had heard Him were concerned, Jesus had come to just save the Jewish nation and I believe that this was certainly part of His plan, but it was also to do so much more. His sacrifice was to save all sheep, all people everywhere, across the whole world. This is why we can all be assured that the promise of salvation because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is for each one of us as well.

If we go back into scripture further, God’s promise to Abraham was to make him the father of many nations. Our God is the God of the whole world and He is there for all who believe in and accept Jesus as the sacrifice for their sins.

Requests for Prayers

We pray for all those who are sick everywhere and for those who have asked for our prayers and for their carers: Roy and Margaret Putnam, Edward Bunn, Brian Bolam, Wendy Dufty, Yvonne Seward and Andy Caddell.

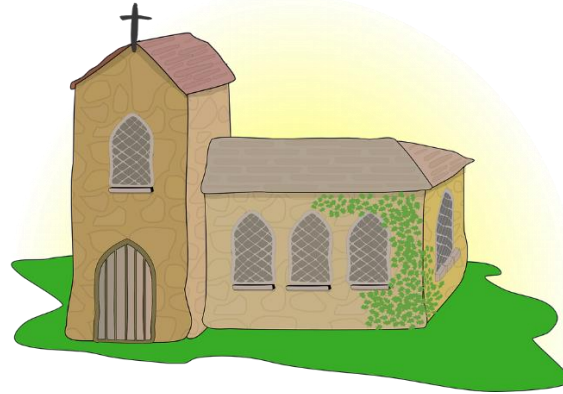
We continue to pray for: Percy and Sharon Blizzard, Jackie Pickford, Clive Hunt.

We pray for those who are in residential care: Sheila Bigland-Gibbons, Barbara Milton and Rita Sheppy.

We pray for those who have died everywhere: For those who we know and for those whose anniversary of death falls at this time. For Margaret Sutton, Pat Hiden, Don Dufty and David Finch

Church Services

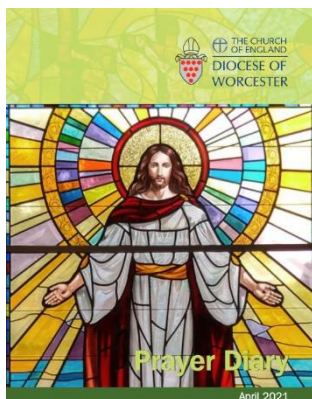
The church services this week will be at:



09.00am Chapel of Ease, Bredon's Norton
10.30am St Barbara's, Ashton Under Hill

May Services

Date	Church	Time	Minister
2 nd May	St Mary's Elmley Castle	10.30am	Canon Roger Spiller
	Holy Trinity, Eckington	10.30am	Reverend Allison Davies
9 th May	St Faith's Overbury	10.30am	Reverend Allison Davies
	St Giles, Bredon	10.30am	Reverend Catherine Lack
16 th May	St James' Defford	10.30am	Reverend Allison Davies
	St Peter's, Little Comberton	10.30am	Canon Roger Spiller
23 rd May Pentecost	United Group Service, St Mary's, Elmley Castle	10.30am	Reverend Allison Davies
30 th May	Chapel of Ease, Bredon's Norton	9.00am	tbc
	St John the Baptist, Beckford	10.30am	Reverend Allison Davies

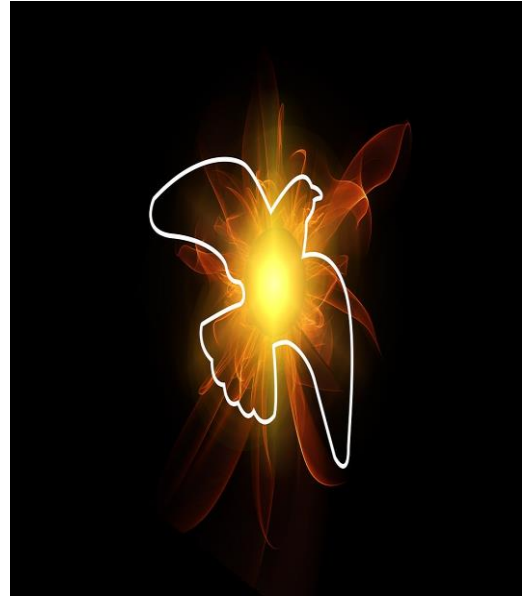


News from the Diocese

Prayers and diocesan news can be found at www.cofe-worcester.org.uk

The Diocesan Spirituality Network

Spirituality is all we Christians really have to offer the world, because the Gospel is nothing other than growing in union with Christ. We are learning how to grow our spirits, grow our souls, in Christ – and helping others to discover with us that this is the fullness of life we seek. The Diocesan Spirituality Network is a collection of all sorts of folk from across Worcestershire and Dudley who want to grow their souls and the network encourage everyone to join in. The group meet virtually or face to face two or three times a year, spending a morning together. Join them for a morning on Zoom on Thursday 6 May, from 10am. Canon Peter Kerr, well known to many in the diocese, will lead the session, reflecting on how our spirits, our souls, have fared over the past year - Signposts & Sanctuaries: Our Pilgrimage through the Pandemic. To book your place, contact Nick Wright: revnmwright@btinternet.com



Reverend Allison Davies

Vicar of Eckington, Defford with Besford and Associate Priest for the churches of the Bredon Hill Group

