

Worship for the 4th Sunday of Easter

3rd May 2020

Dear friends, this week's worship has been prepared by Rev'd Nigel Bibbings, his wife Elisabeth and their son Jonathan because they were due to be at St Paul's but instead have been able to join with us 'virtually'. May you know God's presence in the love and care of friends near and far even at this time. If you would like to write or record something for our weekly worship please do contact me on 07734323402 or email revjamesmorley@outlook.com. With love and prayers, James.

- 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
- 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.

Lord God

You are our Saviour and king
our Master and friend
our Shepherd and guide.
Wherever we go, You are with us.
Wherever we stray, You seek us out.
Whenever we call, You hear us.

You are our promise and our hope
our place of rest and peace
our security and our sureness.
Whoever we are, You accept us.
Whatever we do, You love us.
Whenever we fall, You lift us up.

Lord God we come to this place
from different places,
different lives,
different situations,
with different concerns
and different dreams.
Yet we come as one,
a people of shared faith
in a God who shared all.

And so we praise You, Lord God,
that You have risen from the dead
to fulfil Your promise to all creation;
we praise You that you have gifted us Your spirit
as a companion and guide.
We praise You that you have chosen us as Your people
to build Your kingdom here on earth.

Gracious God our path in life
does not always lead us into quiet, calm places of caring
and compassion for others.
Our journey often takes us off the beaten track
and into the difficult terrain of selfishness and anger.
Our progress is often slowed by fear and anxiety.

Yet You remain at our side, Lord,
to comfort and provide,
reminding us of Your promise
that all is forgiven for all time.
And so we praise You, Lord,
that you bless us anew each day
with Your grace and goodness.
That You open doors to fresh opportunities
and that You lead us by the hand
to a place we can call home.
Take us from here,
refreshed in our journey with You
and with one another,
that we might love You more
and follow You more closely.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

(From the Church of Scotland)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Father, hear the prayer we offer :
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously. | 3 Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay ;
but would strike the living fountains
from the rocks along our way. |
| 2 Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be ;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly. | 4 Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide ;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side. |

John 10:1-10

‘Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.’ ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

“I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture”
(John 10 v 9)

Over the last few weeks I have received a couple of emails from our new District Discipleship Enabler. She is keen to be able to picture what our churches are doing in terms of worship; learning and caring and service. When I first heard from her, I must admit that my initial response was along the lines of “What? Hasn’t she heard of lockdown?” “Doesn’t she know that we together with the rest of the world are in crisis?” “Why are we being asked to set out some areas of our life which might already be in the past?”

That was until I read her last sentence “Of course this information is all related to BC - Before Covid 19. None of us know what the future holds, but we just have to trust in He who is greater than any virus, that we will come through this one way or another”.

Some words of Thomas Merton, Prophet, Trappist monk, writer, theologian and social activist from more than 50 years ago come to mind

"We do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What we need is to recognise the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope".

Now if you think that I am going to be able to address all of the challenges, struggles and possibilities of these deeply challenging, difficult, distressing and uncertain weeks, then you will be disappointed! But I do believe that we can gain great encouragement from our Lord Jesus who says that he is both the gate for the sheep and the good shepherd, both our guard and our guide, our shelter and our inspiration.

In the Greek text Jesus says that he is the ‘door’ and this can also be translated ‘gate’ or ‘entrance’. So whoever Jesus is, He is the way in and he is the way through (!) He is the secure way. He says to us, be careful who you are listening to and how you respond to their voices. You know my voice, you have learnt to trust my voice and to follow me, but beware of those with other voices, those who like thieves and bandits would steal and deceive and negate. Sometimes those negative voices come from within our own heads – we are all capable of anxiety, negativity and getting a bit despondent from time to time in these days, and sometimes it is from the doom-mongers, the negative, cynical and fearful ones whose commentary would rob us of our joy at this time. The devil is such a liar! Beware fake news! Struggling we are, but we do not do so alone, we are in loving fellowship with one other and the voice of Jesus, which we recognise instinctively and instantly invites us to “Come unto me and rest” and not only that, but as Jesus says “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand” (Jn 10 v 27-28). That’s the truth, that Jesus came that all may have life, life with the quality of eternity about it, even in the Spring of 2020, life abundant.

Jesus also says that he is the 'good shepherd'.

Chrysostom said that "When he brings us to the Father he calls himself a Door; when he takes care of us, a Shepherd". Our Good Shepherd shows how very much he loves us in that he laid down his life for us and all his children, his sheep. In him, Jesus, is safety, security and food for the journey that is to come, however challenging, distressing and difficult. Lord knows, we need his guidance, his shepherding, his wisdom and his inspiration in these days. We need his love and his comfort, and it remains true as one commentator has written "There is only one means of entering the sheepfold; there is only one source of knowledge and life; there is only one way to obtain spiritual nourishment; there is only one way to heaven. And the single means of access to all that is good is Jesus". (C. K. Barrett, p373)

So what am I to make of the request for information about the life of my churches from the District Discipleship Enabler?

Well, I shall provide the details that she is seeking for Before Coronavirus, but I do hope that there will be a new story to tell about how we emerge from all of this changed.

I am hopeful that we will not just return to 'business as usual'. But that the "new normal" will see us exploring fresh ways of being church and including others. That we shall be able to learn from our experience of activities like worship on 'Zoom' and 'YouTube' and adapt. And that "the shepherd and guardian of our souls" (1 Peter 2 v 25) will lead his people onwards into abundant resurrection life.

Amen.

(By Nigel Bibbings)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 From the breaking of the dawn
to the setting of the sun,
I will stand
on every promise of your word. Words of
power, strong to save,
that will never pass away ;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For your covenant is sure,
and on this I am secure :
I can stand on every promise of your word.</p> | <p>3 When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
and I'll stand
on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
you will guide me with your hand
as I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
every work begun in me,
so I'll stand
on every promise of your word.</p> |
| <p>2 When I stumble and I sin,
condemnation pressing in,
I will stand
on every promise of your word. You are
faithful to forgive,
that in freedom I might live,
so I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored ;
you remember sins no more.
So I'll stand
on every promise of your word.</p> | <p>4 Hope that lifts me from despair ;
love that casts out every fear
as I stand
on every promise of your word. Not
forsaken, not alone,
for the Comforter has come,
and I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
grace for all who will believe.
We will stand
on every promise of your word.</p> |

Today, 3rd May, is International Dawn Chorus Day! Did you get up early and take your exercise at 5 a.m.? Or did you go out in the garden, or maybe you just had your bedroom window open. Our first prayer is for the natural world. Then we continue with prayers for the human suffering that needs God's help at this particular time. Please respond to the invitation "Loving Lord" with the words: "**Bring them abundant life.**"

Let us pray:

Loving God, we pray for our beautiful, fragile, broken world. Grant us the help of your Spirit in our prayers.

We pray for rainforests denuded, melting glaciers and wildlife deprived of its basic homes. Thank you for Greta Thunberg, Chris Packham, David Attenborough and all those activists whose names we do not know, but who agitate to raise consciousness and to put right the injustices done to the environment. Help us to see what we can do at this time to help the natural world.

Loving Lord

Bring them abundant life.

We pray for those whose lives are empty;
for all who feel alone and unloved;
for those whose lives lack purpose.

Loving Lord

Bring them abundant life.

We pray for those whose lives are filled with anger and bitterness;
for those for whom being at home is dangerous due to abusive relationships;
for those who cannot let go of the past,
and so have no hope for the future.

Loving Lord

Bring them abundant life.

We pray for those whose lives are filled with anguish and pain;
for everyone suffering from Coronavirus, particularly those in hospital,
for those who suffer depression;
for those who are afraid to go out, even for exercise,
for those who cannot see a way forward.

Loving Lord

Bring them abundant life.

We pray for those who live on the edge,
for those who cannot "stay at home" because they have no home to stay in,
for those who lack faith;
for those whom others ignore.

Loving Lord

Bring them abundant life.

Loving God, may your abundant life
fill our world, our Church and ourselves,
in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

(Written by Elisabeth Bibbings, based on prayers for this Sunday in Roots for All Age)

- 1 Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea ;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee,
yet possessing every blessing
if our God our Father be.
- 2 Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us ;
all our weakness thou dost know,
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe ;
tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,
through the desert thou didst go.
- 3 Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy ;
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

May God bless you now and always. Amen.