

Service for Week 15<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> April 2024  
4<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter By Chaplain Andy

**Our Opening Prayer.**

Lord Jesus Christ.

Before we ever loved you, you loved us; before we ever looked for you, you were seeking us out; before we ever made a response, you were guiding our footsteps.

In love you offered your life, and in love you continue to reach out.  
To you be praise and glory, honour and thanksgiving now and for evermore.

**Amen**

*The Lord's Prayer*

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**

**Bible Reading John 10:11-18**

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns 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. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep 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 are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life— only to take it up again. 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."

*Holy words, Holy wisdom,*

***Thanks be to God.***

**Reflection**

Spring and warmer dryer weather has arrived at last. One of the joys of living where we do is seeing the trees turn green again and new life emerging and especially at this time of year seeing the new born lambs out in the fields.

In the rural, farming community where Jesus lived a very familiar sight would have been the shepherds looking after their flocks of sheep on the hillsides. So, it is not surprising that Jesus chose to compare the way that shepherds look after their sheep with the way God, through Jesus looks after each

one of us. Sheep and shepherds were something that most people then in that part of the world would have seen most days and so they understood and connected straight with what Jesus was saying. If now we are not so familiar with sheep and shepherds (or farmers) we could think about how a parent has the same love and care and would be prepared to risk their own life to save their child. The child learns their parents voices and feels safe when hearing them.

Jesus told his disciples that he was prepared for what was going to happen to him, that he would lose his life. Jesus goes on to say, continuing his analogy of the sheep and their shepherd that 'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.' This I believe means that God's love extends to everyone. It is not reserved for people of a particular type, race, colour, culture or background, it excludes nobody. As Jesus put it 'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen'

People from different Christian church groups and from other faiths have drawn comfort from this understanding that God's love is not exclusive. It is not just for those that consider themselves as Christians but extends to those that have a relationship to God through a different path as in other religions, and even to those that don't believe and reject God.

In our reading from John's gospel Jesus said 'I lay down my life for the sheep'. This is why Jesus came, was put to death and rose again as we have been remembering over the Easter period.

It was to lead us to a place where we can find a greater understanding of God and a place where we can form a deeper relationship with God. Other faiths have their own way of finding God but the Christian faith is unique in that we believe that Jesus Christ was not only a human man but was also of God. This makes it easier for us to know that God understands our human thoughts and emotions. We know that he understands the pain and distress that we sometimes experience in life.

Most importantly it helps us to recognize his voice in Jesus and know that he leads us through to an eternal place of safety and love.

**Amen**

**Closing Prayer. Psalm 23:1-4**

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...

**Amen.**

Prayers inspired by Prayerfully Yours by Nick Fawcett