

Morning Worship for the fourth Sunday of Easter

Preparation

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He has given us new life and hope.

He has raised Jesus from the dead.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Opening Prayer

Faithful one, whose word is life:

come with saving power

to free our praise,

inspire our prayer

and shape our lives

for the kingdom of your Son,

Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Cast your burden upon the Lord:

And he will sustain you.

Create in us clean hearts O God:

And renew a right spirit within us.

Cast us not away from your presence:

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Give us the joy of your saving help:

And sustain us with your life-giving Spirit.

Blessed be the Lord day by day:

The God of our salvation who bears our burdens.

We confess our sins.

Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord,

we come to you in sorrow for our sins,

and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength,

and not by the power of your resurrection.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes,
as faithless and not believing.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone,

and doubted our home in heaven.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

May the God of love and power

forgive you and free you from your sins,

heal and strengthen you by his Spirit,

and raise you to new life in Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

Praise

O Lord, open our lips:

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Let us worship the Lord:

All praise to his name.

Gloria in Excelsis

**Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.**

Lord God, heavenly King,

almighty God and Father,

we worship you, we give you thanks,

we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,

Lord God, Lamb of God,

you take away the sin of the world:

have mercy on us;

you are seated at the right hand of the Father:

receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,

you alone are the Lord,

you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,

with the Holy Spirit,

in the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

The word of God

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Many were baptized and were added to the community. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47)

A reading from the gospel of John

Jesus said to the Pharisees: '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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' (John 10:1–10)

A reflection by Revd Stephen Burge, Curate at Eaton Bray with Edlesborough

Sheep appear very frequently in the New Testament. We have the parables like the Lost Sheep and the Division of the Sheep and the Goats, we have the image of Jesus as the Lamb of God, we have the false prophets who are dressed in sheep's clothing, and the lost sheep of Israel, the disciples are sent out like sheep among wolves, and Jesus asks Peter to feed his sheep. There is, then, something special about sheep. I expect one of the reasons why Jesus liked talking about sheep is that they were something that everyone he was

preaching to would have known about – even the people living in great cities, like Jerusalem. So by using imagery that everyone would understand Jesus made sure that everyone knew what he was saying.

In John's passage about the Good Shepherd, the message is clear. We are the sheep and Jesus is our shepherd. We are all being called to be sheep. Now, if we called someone a sheep, we would probably be thinking of someone who just follows the crowd, unthinkingly and unquestioningly. But, what Jesus meant when he used this image of sheep is that Jesus will look after us, as a shepherd cares for his sheep. Sheep need to be led to pasture and to water, they need to be protected from attacks by wolves; sheep need to be looked after. So Jesus means that he will look after us, lead us to where we need to be and care and protect us in times of trouble.

Sheep also have a habit of getting scared and panicking, and we too can be the same. The coronavirus pandemic has definitely shown us that! It wasn't so long ago that nobody could find the daily essentials from flour to pasta to toilet roll for love or money. I am sure that there are still things ahead that could make us panic. In this parable, Jesus reminds us that he will look after and get us to the place we need to be. The Good Shepherd will lie down in the gateway to the sheep-pen and protect us from the dangers that could be lying in wait for us. He will, above all, be with us. And because he is the Good Shepherd, he will not leave us or abandon, but will be with us always.

But I think that Jesus' parable also tells us that we are a flock and that that is something we should rejoice in. In the passage we heard from the Acts of the Apostles, we heard that the early community looked after one another, especially those who had little or nothing, sharing things in common. We are a community, a flock, and we care for each other and are one body. Being online may make that sense of being together a little harder – it isn't quite the same as being together in Church – but it is a great joy to me that I know we are coming together to worship online, from wherever we may be. We are called not just to be sheep following the Good Shepherd, but we are also called to be a flock. But we are special kind of flock, because we are flock that that is also called to be a shepherd too. God wants all of us to spread the good news of the resurrection to everyone we meet, so that our flock grows in number, but, more importantly, that our flock grows in love. We will always need God to guide us, and to lead us to where we

need to be, but there are so many opportunities for us to help lead people to faith and to let them join our flock.

Jesus' image of the Good Shepherd gives us much food for thought, especially about our personal relationships with God and our relationships with one another as a community. In times of anxiety and stress, it is a great comfort to know that Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, is here with us and will always lead us to where we need to be. Amen.

Our faith

Let us declare our faith in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he was buried;
he was raised to life on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures;
afterwards he appeared to his followers,
and to all the apostles:
this we have received,
and this we believe. Amen.**

Prayers of intercession- Gordon Gray Reader at St Mary's

In joy and hope let us pray to the Father. That our risen Saviour may fill us, and many others through our virtual worship, with the joy of Christ's glorious and life-giving resurrection.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We remember that the early church ate their food with glad and generous hearts. We thank you that we are well fed and receive so many blessings and ask you forgiveness for the way in which these blessings are so often wasted. We hold before you those millions of people in your world who still experience basic human needs - the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, refugees, outcasts, prisoners, the unloved. We pray for the health of our society and that lessons may be learnt from the present crisis praying that you will give each of us the precious gift of your peace. Enable us to bring this peace into all that we think and do; and strengthen us to work and pray until the whole earth is filled with your peace.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We remember that the early church devoted itself to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Help us too to be dedicated and joyful in our worship, praising you at all times. We remember that the early church recognised the things that they had in common rather than their differences. And on this day when on our Prayer Cycle we hold before you those who live on Chiltern View Travellers Caravan Site we pray that we should make no distinction because of race, colour, sex, age, class or party - a fellowship of love in which all are truly in Christ.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for the ministry of our bishops, especially on this day for the Bishop of Hertford, Michael Beasley and for Joy and for Stephen and their families and, in our Cycle of Prayer, all those who minister in The Episcopal Church in the Middle East, Show them unwavering faith through times of doubt or difficulty and fill their hearts with your grace and humility to enable them to lead your people ever closer to your side. Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for the leaders of the nations and all who have the responsibility of government. We pray for all who are in the front-line of the campaign against Coronavirus, for all key-workers, for those striving to find a cure. Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We remember that the early church recognised your healing power and were in awe because of the many wonders and signs they experienced. We thank you for that power of healing. Surround the frightened with your tenderness, give strength to those in pain, hold the weak in your arms of love and give hope and patience to those who are recovering. In stillness and humility we hold before you those people known to us in need of healing and peace.

May they be calmed and comforted by the knowledge that your merciful eyes are watching them. If it be your will, restore them to health and strength, and comfort all those who watch and wait.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for the souls of those who have died recently, for those who mourn: Uphold them in your love. Help them to find a sense of purpose in the future years of their life.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Jesus the resurrection and the life, we give you thanks for all who have lived and believed in you. Raise us with them to eternal life Merciful Father **accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

A prayer for the coronavirus outbreak
Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*We join together with Christians throughout the world in the prayer
that Jesus taught us.*

**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.**

Conclusion

The Collect for the day
Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

God has claimed us as his own.
He has brought us out of darkness.
He has made us light to the world.
Alleluia. Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

*We end with the words of the Grace, an ancient Christian prayer of
fellowship, remembering that although we are not together in person,
nothing can separate us from the love of God found in Christ Jesus
our Lord.*

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all evermore. Amen.**



*If you would like us to pray for you during this time of stress and
anxiety, please leave a prayer request on the website email address
or contact Joy (vicar@stmaryseatonbray.org.uk)*

Reverend Joy Cousans
Reverend Stephen Burge

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