**Dorset South and West Circuit**

Service for Sunday 3 May2020 by Revd Gwyneth Owen

Prayers by Local Preachers on Note: Chris Smith and Roger Phillips

**Bible readings**

Psalm 23

John 10:1-10

Centre yourself in God’s presence in whatever way works best for you – a lit candle, a time of silence or, maybe, breathing in “be” and out “still”.

When you’re ready, I invite you to say the following service out loud and slowly, letting the words sink deep into your being. Don’t rush from one section to the other – take time.

**Hymn**

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.*

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.

*Chorus*

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.

*Chorus*

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**Prayers by Chris Smith. Let us pray:**

Loving God, shepherd and guide of your people, as we draw close to you in worship, we express our adoration towards you and give you thanks for the many people, places and abundant life in all its forms that you have set around us. We pray that, as we focus, you will reach deep within us and teach us more of your plans so that they may seamlessly become ours too. Most especially we thank you for your Son, our Friend, who conquered death, our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whose victorious name we pray. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession**

Lord, we call to mind the times when we haven't chosen your correct pathway; when our thoughts and actions have been less than complimentary to your ways.

*In silence, we consider those times and choices as we place them before you.*

We rejoice to hear the forgiving words of Christ, “Your sins are forgiven”. Lead us on to follow your ways more closely to the glory of your name. Amen.

**Read John 10:1-10 (printed at the end of this service)**

**Reflection**

Whilst out for my daily exercise, I pass fields of sheep and lambs. One day, there was a racket that could be heard from some distance – the farmer was feeding them supplements. Long after the farmer had gone, lambs were trying to get themselves reunited with their mums, and mums were bellowing to their lambs – lambs and mums easily wander when there’s food on offer!

Our Bible passage is all about sheep – protecting, feeding and leading them. The shepherd plays an important role in all three.

Jesus refers to himself as the shepherd in the first 5 verses, though doesn’t make this clear until verse 11 (I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep). He goes into the sheepfold by the gate and calls his sheep (many different flocks would be penned in over night). His flock knows his voice and so follow him.

Two things for reflection: Firstly, reference is made to thieves and bandits (verse 1) who enter the sheepfold for dubious reasons. To whom was Jesus referring? Maybe to some religious and political authorities who made life hard for ordinary folk and did not have their best interests at heart. Who might those people be for us today? Secondly, notice the intimacy of the language: the sheep **hear, know, follow and run after** the shepherd. Is Jesus trying to explain that this is the relationship he longs to have with his followers then, and in every generation? Followers who hear, know and follow him? What impact does that have on you today – pause and think about it.

Secondly, when it’s clear his hearers don’t understand the imagery he’s using (verse 6) Jesus makes another attempt to teach them by describing himself as the gate for the sheep (verse 7). There are some who think that, when on the hills, a shepherd would build a rough pen of stones with a small doorway that the shepherd himself would fill by lying there overnight to protect the sheep. A literal gate!

But what does Jesus the gate mean for us? Perhaps it is that through him we understand abundant life (verse 10), as we follow in his ways. The “gate” is to be lived out in our experience as we live our lives more and more to the rhythm of how Jesus conducted his relationships: with compassion, understanding, forgiveness, inclusion. In our current Covid-19 crisis we have ample opportunity to develop those quality of relationships by letter, phone, email and/or all kinds of social media. Don’t we?

I’m also intrigued about the gate, because a gate looks two ways – inside (to the pen) and outside (to the rest of the world). Of all the gospels, John makes it quite clear that God loves the world and demonstrates that love through Jesus who is both shepherd and gate. The shepherd cares for the flock – for which we rejoice - but it is not a static flock. The gate looks out to the world of need and leads us to live the kind of generous and self-giving lives that are so attractive to others, in order that more of God’s love and compassion may be revealed. The Thursday night applause for NHS and other key workers demonstrates how appreciative people are of self-giving care. In what ways do we as a church, or you, dear reader, position ourselves in the safety of the pen ( and it is good place to be) and in what ways do we look outwards following the one who is both shepherd and gate? The invitation is for us to find ourselves and find God both inside and outside the sheepfold. Food for thought, indeed. Amen.

**Prayers of Intercession by Roger Phillips**. Let us pray:

Loving and Abundant God,

Your son, our Lord Jesus Christ said;

"I am with you always".

Be with us today as we offer our prayers for others, and for ourselves.

We pray......

For all who are affected by coronavirus,

through illness, isolation or anxiety, bring them comfort, relief and recovery.

For politicians and scientists who are guiding our country at this time.

Give them wisdom and compassion when making important policies and decisions.

For doctors, nurses, carers and medical researchers,

that through their skill and insights, many will be comforted and restored to health.

For all others working to keep our nation supplied,

lorry drivers, warehouse and supermarket staff, and many others,

make them aware of our appreciation.

For our schools and young people, that in times of isolation from friends,

their emotional well-being can be cared for,

For our homes and families and those we love, and for those in any kind of need or distress.

For parts of your world where because of living conditions social isolation is impossible,

we think especially of South Africa, where the poorest in society are suffering the most,

be with them, and make them aware of your unending love.

Lastly we pray for ourselves,

We thank you for the faith to believe what we have not seen.

With the prayers of our hearts, we give ourselves to Your service.

We pray all our prayers, trusting in Your loving care and protection.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, our Shepherd and our Friend

Amen

**The Lord’s Prayer**

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.

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;
Lone and dreary, faint and weary,
Through the desert Thou didst go.

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.

Thank you for being part of worship across the Methodist Circuit by using this service. As we end:

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and all whom you love, now and for evermore. Amen

# John 10:1-10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

**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. **2**The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. **3**The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4**When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. **5**They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” **6**Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

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