

Circuit Written service 26th April 2026 by Revd Steph Jenner

Call to worship Acts 2: 42 – 47

[The Believers] 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.

Hymn StF 548

Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine:
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God;
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood:

*This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of rapture burst on my sight;
angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love:

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest –
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love:

Frances Jane van Alstyne

Prayers of Praise and Confession

Lord Jesus, we come before You, trusting in Your unwavering love as our Shepherd. In moments of doubt and fear, remind us of Your constant presence and guidance. Strengthen our faith, Lord, that we may rest in the assurance of Your care. Help us to follow You faithfully, knowing that Your love never falters. Whether we have the zeal of the apostles and early followers, or the world-weariness of present day disciples, we praise you that you are with us all the days of our lives and goodness and mercy abound when we let go of our worries and let you lead us to rest by those still waters and green pastures.

Forgive us when we go astray, when we cause unnecessary problems, when we have to be the focus of attention when we make others feel unsafe, unloved, unworthy. Help us to remember that we are part of your flock, and whilst unique and equally loved, we are part of the mission to bring peace and joy and love to the world.

We are sorry for our disruption, intentional and accidental, and we pray that your forgiveness will find each and every one of us as we repent and return to your fold. Help us to forgive others, so that we may be ourselves forgiven, and that we may continue to work together to bring in your kingdom on earth, each being equally worthy, each having an equal share. Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please pray whichever version in whatever language you prefer

Hymn StF 513

Take this moment, sign, and space;
take my friends around;
here among us make the place
where your love is found.

Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
all I've failed to tend.

Take the tiredness of my days,
take my past regret,
letting your forgiveness touch
all I can't forget.

Take the little child in me,
scared of growing old;
help me here to find my worth
made in Christ's own mould.

Tale my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be;
let my life be yours, and yet,
let it still be me.

John L Bell & Graham Maule

Reading John 10: 1 – 10

[Jesus said] '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.



Reflection

In this 4th week after Easter, when we are halfway to Pentecost, we learn of the actions of the first assemblies, ecclesia, the beginnings of the church, and we see the ideals set. Ideals that every religious group throughout history has aspired to. But I want to think about some practicalities here. In the reading from John's Gospel we find the familiar passage about Jesus talking about being a good shepherd and it started me thinking about the various roles assigned to Jesus, by himself and by others.

There are many, many names that Jesus is called throughout our Bible, about 50 in all, from the promises in Isaiah, so much a part of our Advent and Christmas story – Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace – right through to the Revelation of John where Jesus describes himself as the ‘bright morning star’. And in amongst all these names are the roles or jobs. Jesus is called ‘carpenter’, presumably his early trade alongside and taught by Joseph, and then ‘teacher’ as he starts his ministry. Along the way he is also referred to as ‘shepherd’, ‘prophet’, ‘judge’, ‘advocate’, ‘mediator’, ‘High Priest’, ‘king’, and ‘Christ’ or Messiah.

These are known as his Titles of Mission, and as you can see above, progress from the humblest to the highest. Some titles were self-given, others conferred, sometimes with malice in mind. To me it shows that even in his lifetime, Jesus was a man for all people, different people related to him depending on what they witnessed and what they needed. If you needed healing, then he was a healer, if you were confused, then he was a teacher, if you were lost, then he was a shepherd bringing you home to safety.

As his mission grew from being amongst the local, ordinary people of the day, to frequent encounters with the ruling classes and religious leaders, he then became known by titles that they could relate to, even if they didn’t like it. The ultimate being the sign on the cross bearing the legend ‘King of the Jews’ – being put there by Pontius Pilate and the Romans, who recognised his authority.

I believe that with Jesus being able to connect to anyone, of whatever (real or perceived) standing, is one of the many things that allows him to be with us today because we too can feel that connection. Paul in his letter to the Romans reminds us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12: 15) and so we have the pattern for being with people as Christians. Be for them what they need us to be, even if it’s differing ways, moods, supports, for differing people. When Jesus spoke as reported in John’s Gospel above, he was bringing reassurance and salvation to a worried, lost, bewildered people. They could understand it completely as they lived among shepherds if they were in the country, or the outskirts of towns and cities. Shepherding provided warmth through wool, meat and cheese to eat, even milk to drink. The shepherding community was of women as well as men, and the women often acted as midwives for the people around them. Shepherds were important, fiercely protective of their flocks, ready to ward off danger, and versatile in their role. So as Jesus is the Good Shepherd to them, and us, it is our mission to do the same for others and allow them to do for us. Amen.

Hymn StF 322

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer’s ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
‘tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.

Dear name – the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding place,
my never-failing treasury,
filled with boundless stores of grace!

Jesus! My shepherd, Brother, Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I’ll praise thee as I ought.

Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of name
refresh my soul in death.

John Newton

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Loving God, in this time between Easter and Pentecost, we thank you for all that your Son did for us and gave to us especially during this time. Thank you for this pattern for living knowing that we need guidance in all aspects of our lives, and for being there to provide it, in lived examples, Gospel teachings, and through the advocacy of the Holy Spirit.

In our prayers we pray for all, including ourselves, who need guidance, protection, security, and life:

We pray for the world, and all the dangers that it holds from weather patterns, natural disasters to human made wars and catastrophes, senseless killing, unnecessary starvation, withheld medicines, and inequality of wealth and resources.

We pray for those we know and love, nearby or far away who need a life that is secure, so that they know that they can provide for themselves and their families, where employment is not exploitative, where safety nets hold strong, where neighbours look out for one another.

We pray for ourselves that we may be guided in the Way of Christ and can look forward in certain hope of abundant life, that we can share with those around us. Guide us to continue to learn and grow in knowledge and wisdom, in compassion and love, for ourselves and our communities.

May we be good examples for other Christians and those looking at the church, yet to make a decision about where their life is and is going. May we be shepherds, not rounding them up, but taking care of them, as they need, until they are ready to find their own paths.

Let us also rejoice, we pray, in the daily tasks we are given, that we may do them to the best of our ability, praising God in all things. Amen.

Hymn StF 479

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.

Henry Williams Baker

Blessing

May we always be blessed in our life
following our Good Shepherd,
and may we be a blessing to our flock
as we live in the way of Jesus Christ
our risen Lord and Saviour. Amen.