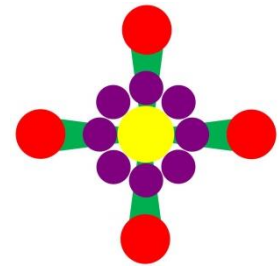


# The Benefice of Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme



## 3 May 2020 - Fourth Sunday of Easter

*If you can, start at 10.30am.*

*Do not worry if you cannot keep to that time, still join in!*

*Take a moment to be still. Perhaps light a candle or hold a cross.*

*Be aware that others will be saying these same words and prayers.*

*We are united in prayer and worship.*

*Janice leads us in our Opening and Closing worship*

Great and glorious God ...

We join together today, ones and twos, separated by distance but joined together by your Holy Spirit. We place ourselves before you and acknowledge that you alone are our strength and refuge.

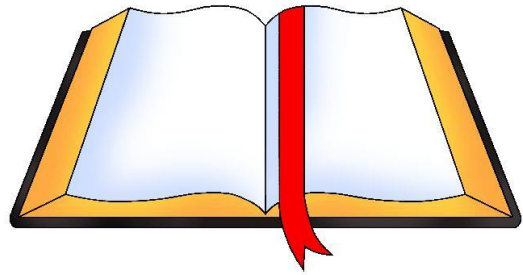
*Pause for reflection ...*



Lord God, as we bow our heads in humble worship, may we follow you in light and truth, just as sheep that follow the Good Shepherd; may we trust in you alone. Amen

***First Reading: Acts 2: 42 - end***

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

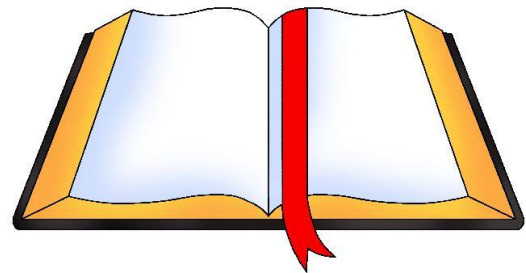


Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, 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.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his Word

***Second Reading: 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. 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.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his Word.

*Liz leads us this morning in our Reflection*

“What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare.” So begins the poem by William Henry Davies. One of the pleasures of the past few weeks has been having the time to stand, to stare and to listen.

The bird outside in the garden sings so joyfully, so loudly, (dare I say?) so chirpily! I wonder, is he singing more loudly this year – or is it that the birdsong is not being drowned out by other noises, of traffic, of planes overhead, of machinery or of people?

Other signs of Spring have brought their own blessings – brightly coloured flowers, buds opening on trees and bushes, the lambs running about in the fields. And how appropriate that in this season, one of our Bible readings reminds us of the shepherd, looking after his sheep.

In the reading from John’s gospel Jesus describes the work of a shepherd. Shepherds in Jesus’ day would spend weeks on end with their flocks, protecting them against the attacks of wild animals. He would keep a check on all of his flock, caring for them and looking after them. Each sheep was important to him.

Jesus had used such an image in his parable of the lost sheep in Luke’s gospel where he describes the dedication of the shepherd, who, even though he had 99 sheep safely herded together, set off to find the lost sheep and return it to the fold. Society generally at that time may have looked down upon the lowly shepherds, if they considered them at all, but Jesus appreciated the finer details of their work and how their commitment to their flocks could be indicative of many fine qualities.

In the first part of the reading, Jesus describes someone who is totally committed to his flock, no doubt recognising them and being able to identify individuals. As a result of such loving care, each of his flock would recognise and respond to his voice, being able to differentiate between their shepherd’s voice and any other voices which were heard around them. The shepherd would give a sense of safety and security on which the flock could depend. The strength of the bond between the shepherd and his flock is unmistakable.

When we read further in the chapter, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his flock.” In this season of Easter we

are very aware how Jesus , the good shepherd, did give up his life for the sake of those he loved and cared for, for the sake of the whole world. But we also know that this love was only the beginning of those life-changing Easter events. That love was stronger than death, and by his resurrection Jesus restored the relationship between God and his people for all who choose to follow him, not just at that time but throughout the times since then and for all of eternity. And in that relationship, Jesus promises life in all its fullness.

Even in the present troubled times, we can gain great comfort from those promises from Jesus. Such love can transform our lives in so many ways, bringing gifts and blessings into our lives.

If we consider the gifts of the Good Shepherd, I wonder which of his blessings resonate most with you.

Is it the promise of security as you are held safely in God's love?

Is it the promise of being in his presence at all times, through the good times and the not so good times?

Is it the idea of the pasture, a place of peace and calm where all of one's needs are met? That certainly seems to echo the promise of Jesus giving life abundantly to all who follow him.

Or, as with many people, do different aspects resonate more at different times? You may like to spend some time reflecting on the words of the reading yourself and letting those promises speak to you. Let Jesus speak to you.

Jesus spoke of the sheep recognising the shepherd's voice. He used the description of the Good Shepherd in his teaching some time before his death and resurrection. His early followers heard his voice – but he has continued to speak to his followers through the words of his teaching. After the first Easter day, it is highly likely that some of his disciples engaged in conversations beginning, "do you remember when he said..." and again, they would recognise his voice. They would take time to ponder and reflect on what he had shared with them. He continues to speak to us now.

As he is our good shepherd he continues to speak to us. He may speak to us through the silence of our prayer time, through the words of Scripture, through the words or actions of those around us, the possibilities are endless.

Like the shepherd, he may speak to comfort or to encourage us, to value or to challenge us. Do we take time to listen to his voice – or like the bird singing earlier, is his voice often drowned out by the other noises around us, by the busyness – or our worries and anxieties? Yet, as the sweetness of the birdsong has been particularly noticeable in these unusual times, surely Jesus' voice with its promise of life in all its fullness is an even more precious gift, a true blessing.

May we continue to hear and respond to the voice of the one who loves us more than life itself, the one who promises "I am with you always, to the very end of the age." We are held safe in the love of Jesus, the Good Shepherd so may we be strengthened by hearing his voice and may our lives reflect that love in our care for others.

May God bless you in the coming week.

*Beverly leads us in our prayers:*

Let us pray to the God of Peace, whose Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, was brought back from the dead to be the great Shepherd, grant that we may be led by him out of darkness and death into the fullness of life eternal; through the same Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, in all eternity. Amen.

As we are joined together by this act of worship, but are separated by restrictions of Covid19, let us remember each other as we all continue to adjust to this new way of living each day.

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy. Sustain and support the anxious, be with those who care for the sick, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may find comfort knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us remember our families and friends and all those we love, those we cannot be with physically, but who we always keep close to our hearts.

God of Compassion, whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, shared the life of a home in Nazareth, and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself: strengthen us in our daily living that in joy and sorrow we may know the power of your presence to bind together and heal.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for our Church, our Diocese, Bishops, our clergy and laity and all those who minister in your name. We ask that you continue to give them strength and vision to lead us in these strange times, to help us keep the faith and to know that with your guidance and vision we can find a way through this crisis.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Father God, we pray for the whole world in this time of world crisis. We pray for all the world's leaders that they have the strength and knowledge to find a way through this difficult and unprecedented time. We pray for our own government and our local government as they look for solutions and we pray for each other that by following the physical distancing rules and staying home we will eventually come together again.

O Lord our God, source of all goodness and love, accept the fervent prayers of your people; in the multitude of your mercies look with compassion upon all those who turn to you for help; for you are gracious, O lover of souls and to you we give glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for all NHS staff, for all key workers as they go about their work, we thank them all for their commitment and compassion.

We pray for all those who are ill, those in our community, those we know personally and those on our notice sheet. Let us also pray for those who are lonely and isolated and ask that we all look out for each other in these difficult times.

We also pray for all those key workers who have lost their lives caring for others, we will always remember their ultimate sacrifice.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord of life and love, we praise you for all who have borne fruit in your service;  
For all who have forwarded your kingdom;  
For all who have shared their love and goodness.  
We pray for all our loved ones departed and remember those who mourn.  
We pray especially for Linda as she mourns the tragic death of her husband Paul, we hold her in our prayers at this sad time.

Merciful father,  
Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

And we draw all of our prayers together in the words of the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your Kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On earth, as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread,  
Forgive us our sins,  
As we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil.  
For the Kingdom, the power  
and the glory are Yours  
Now and for ever. Amen

Merciful Father, you gave your son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd and to lay down his life for us. May we be always kept under His protection and may we be given grace to follow in his steps; and may his blessing be upon us and remain with us always. Amen.

Let us share the words of the Grace together:

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Love of God and  
The fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, evermore. Amen.

