



Sunday 3rd May 2020

Fourth Sunday of Easter

**The Beacon Parishes Mission Community of Ipplepen with Torbryan,
Denbury, Broadhempston and Woodland**

FIRST READING

Acts 2.42-End

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

Life among the Believers

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.

PSALM

Psalms 23

The Divine Shepherd

A Psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

my whole life long.

SECOND READING

John 10.1-10

Jesus the Good Shepherd

'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.

A REFLECTION BY REVEREND ANNE BURDEN

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Easter - often called Good Shepherd Sunday - because the Gospel Readings for all three years of our lectionary explore some aspect of the idea of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. This is an image which had a particular relevance in the rural communities of Israel in the early beginnings of Christianity - but has something to teach disciples of all times and places (whether they have knowledge of sheep farming, or not!!) The Gospel Reading today offers the slightly strange idea of Jesus as the Gate to the Sheepfold - and like me, you've probably heard sermons about the sheep gathered in the safety of the sheepfold, kept from straying into danger by the shepherd sleeping in the gap where we might expect the gate to be.

These days of coronavirus throw a particular light on this image as we are all instructed to stay in our own sheepfold - for our own protection and for the protection of others. Most of us understand this edict and conform to it fairly willingly - while at the same time realising that there is more to life than the safety of the sheepfold, and yearn for the time when we can move beyond the confines of our own homes to engage once more in a greater fullness of life. And perhaps when this happens, we hope that we might appreciate all these things more. But the reading is much more than a reflection on the safety of sheepfolds.

Parables are one of the ways used by Jesus and the Jewish teachers before him to explore questions which boil down to "where is God - and what is he like?" And our 'work' for today, as we worship in whatever way we can, is to try to find some of those answers for ourselves - answers which have a relevance to our times and our individual experiences.

A few thoughts and questions to start with

- Where do we find Jesus in our own sheepfold? - have we made any new discoveries? - or are we still grieving as we imagine God shut up, as it were, in our sadly but necessarily closed churches?
- Do we think of Jesus as guarding our gates and doorways - loving us so much that he tries to keep us safe both within and when we venture out?
- Do we remember - and not just on Good Friday - that that his love for each one of us is so passionate that he gave - and still gives - his life for all his people? - particularly those who are hurting and in distress, putting himself in danger for us.
- Do we believe that Jesus the Good Shepherd leads us? - accompanies us wherever we decide to go - not snapping at our heels like a sheepdog - but out ahead, where we can see him as the one showing us the way.

You may have many more questions and thoughts - take time to sit with them.

The psalm set for the Fourth Sunday of Easter is Psalm 23 - The Lord's my Shepherd. How could it be any other!! Can I suggest that you read it - in your favourite translation or in another one to challenge you - through this week - and think of the Good Shepherd whenever you have the chance to step across your threshold - and wherever it is in life that you choose to travel.