

## At Home Service 25<sup>th</sup> April 2021 – Easter 4

### **The Preparation**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! In him is my hope and my salvation. I affirm my confidence in his resurrection.

### ***Singing the Faith 1 all people that on earth do dwell – William Kethe (d. 1594)***

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|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | All people that on earth do dwell,<br>sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:<br>him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;<br>come ye before him and rejoice. | 2 | The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;<br>without our aid he did us make:<br>we are his folk, he doth us feed;<br>and for his sheep he doth us take. |
| 3 | O enter then his gates with praise;<br>approach with joy his courts unto;<br>praise, laud, and bless his name always,<br>for it is seemly so to do.            | 4 | For why, the Lord our God is good;<br>his mercy is for ever sure;<br>his truth at all times firmly stood,<br>and shall from age to age endure.  |
| 5 | To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,<br>the God whom heaven and earth adore,<br>from earth and from the angel host<br>be praise and glory evermore.                  |   |   |

### ***Prayer of adoration***

God of creation, you are in command. I see and wonder at lengthening days, with new life bursting from seed and egg, twig and bulb. I hear the sounds of joy, the songs of birds, the buzzing of insects, the shouts of children at play. I smell the fresh day, I sense the crisp night. I feel the warm returning sun, the cool spring showers. I delight in new opportunities for being with others and working in community. This is a thrilling world. I am glad to be part of it. For who you are and what you have done for me, I adore you.

### ***A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness***

Lord, am I a sheep or am I a wolf? For sometimes it seems that a killer instinct is more valued in this world, and I become one who preys on communities rather than living in community. I may not be aware of it, for the ways of the world are seductive and it is easy to slip into wolves' clothing without thinking. I make bad choices – how and where I spend my money – not thinking of the exploitation that may have taken place. Lord, Good Shepherd, forgive me these times – when the wolf lurks beneath. Remind me that, as a Christian, I am a creature of the fold. Bring me back to the community of love and life as it should be lived. Amen.

### ***Assurance of forgiveness***

Lord, who lays down your life for your sheep, how can I doubt your forgiveness?  
Arms once stretched out upon a cross now close in embrace as I return; enfolded, may I know the fullness of love that lives to forgive, and forgives that I might live. Amen.

### ***Singing the Faith 481 The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want***

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| 1 | The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;<br>he makes me lie in pastures green,<br>he leads me by the still, still waters,<br>his goodness restores my soul. | 2 | He guides my ways in righteousness,<br>and he anoints my head with oil;<br>and my cup — it overflows with joy,<br>I feast on his pure delights. |
|   | <i>And I will trust in you alone,<br/>and I will trust in you alone,<br/>for your endless mercy follows me,<br/>your goodness will lead me home.</i>      |   |   |

3       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.

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### **Acts 4.5-12**

<sup>5</sup>The Jewish rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, <sup>6</sup>with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. <sup>7</sup>When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’ <sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup>if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup>let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. <sup>11</sup>This Jesus is

“the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.”

<sup>12</sup>There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.’

### **John 10.11-18**

Jesus said to the Pharisees: <sup>11</sup>‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

<sup>12</sup>The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup>The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.’

### **Reflection**

A group of older people living in a block of low-rise inner-city flats looked forward to Mondays. Mondays was when their bins were emptied.

You might wonder whether their rubbish was particularly smelly to be so excited about their bins being emptied. What had happened was that over several years, the residents and the binmen and women, had got to know each other by name. The binmen never stayed very long; they were always rushing on to the next bin and the next street – schedules to fulfil! But while the bins were being emptied, for those few moments, the binmen and residents exchanged gossip and asked after each other. And the binmen asked especially after those they hadn't seen for a while.

For some of the residents it was one of very few points of human contact during their week. For some of the residents it was just a bit of Monday morning fun, but for others it was a lifeline. They felt – they knew – they were not all alone; they were part of a community. And in that community, relationships mattered. And in that community, they felt cared for. Relationships make us all feel cared for.

Then, without warning – or that is how it felt to the residents – it all changed. The old well-known team of binmen were given a new area to work. Monday mornings weren't the same for the residents. They now had to get used to a new group of ‘waste management and disposal technicians’ as they were now called. They had to start building their relationships all over again. The sense of being a community was certainly diminished for a while. Some residents said the changes made them feel less cared for.

Those words of Jesus showing himself as the Good Shepherd gives us all a picture of community. The Good Shepherd cares for His sheep and is willing to lay down His life for the sheep when the wolf attacks.

As we look at what it means to be a good shepherd in our flock, in our communities do we see ourselves as like the binmen of the story? The contact with reality, the lifeline for the lonely, the ones who ask when someone is missing.

Coping with the pandemic and its aftermath during this past year has provided many challenges to our sense of community, and some very good opportunities too. But as we come out of this time of isolation and fear what is God calling us to do that will help us build relationships and make sure everyone in our community feels cared for and part of the 'fold'?

There is much that we might do to re-instate past activities, but what else can we do to ensure that others can be drawn out of their hiding places, out of isolation and fear. And what should we leave behind to make things happen?

In our modern context are we called to be the binmen, or as Jesus would say a good shepherd?

### ***Singing the Faith 681 Community of Christ (tune Leoni)***

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|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Community of Christ,<br>who make the Cross your own,<br>live out your creed and risk your life<br>for God alone:<br>the God who wears your face,<br>to whom all worlds belong,<br>whose children are of every race<br>and every song.          | 2 | Community of Christ,<br>look past the Church's door<br>and see the refugee, the hungry,<br>and the poor.<br>Take hands with the oppressed,<br>the jobless in your street,<br>take towel and water, that you wash<br>your neighbour's feet. |
| 3 | Community of Christ,<br>through whom the word must sound —<br>cry out for justice and for peace<br>the whole world round:<br>disarm the powers that war<br>and all that can destroy,<br>turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish<br>into joy. | 4 | When menace melts away,<br>so shall God's will be done,<br>the climate of the world be peace<br>and Christ its Sun;<br>our currency be love<br>and kindness our law,<br>our food and faith be shared as one<br>for evermore.               |

Shirley Erena Murray (b. 1931). Words: © 1992, Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188, USA. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

### ***Prayers***

Lord, a year ago your house was not a fold in which we could meet. Confined to our homes, we prayed as a silent wolf prowled the world, a pandemic that threatened us all. I thank you for watching over us, and for those of us who were safely delivered. It was a testing time, Lord, but yet there was community. I thank you for the proof that your Church has no walls, as we learned to reach out to one another and still to worship – but in different ways.

I thank you for those in our communities who had been taken for granted, overlooked, not considered of great importance, but on whom we came to rely to save lives. I thank you that our values were tested, and that we saw what really matters. Good Shepherd, who knows suffering and sacrifice beyond our imagining, I thank you that we are here today, enfolded in your love. Amen.

I pray for the lost sheep of this world: for politicians striving to hang onto power and influence, for leaders of the nations who have forgotten to serve the common good.

I pray for the lost sheep of this world: for those who follow the fashions and frivolities of today at the expense of tomorrow, for those who get swept along by the crowd on tides of prejudice and easy judgements.

I pray for the lost sheep of this world: for those who wander off on their own, to escape from reality, for those who are led astray, away from safety and well-being.

I pray for the lost sheep of this world: for those who take what they have for granted, for those who are unable to give thanks for the things they have. Amen.

### ***The Lord's Prayer***

#### ***Offering and prayer of dedication***

God, in the Risen Christ you have shown your power and given us hope. Set us free to use your gifts for the good of your world.

#### ***Singing the faith 664 Lord you call us to your service (tune Angel Voices)***

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|---|---|
| 1 Lord, you call us to your service,<br>each in our own way.<br>Some to caring, loving, healing;<br>some to preach, or pray;<br>some to work with quiet learning,<br>truth discerning,<br>day by day. | 2 Life for us is always changing<br>in the work we share.<br>Christian love adds new dimensions<br>to the way we care.<br>For we know that you could lead us,<br>as you need us,<br>anywhere. |
| 3 Seeing life from your perspective<br>makes your challenge plain,<br>as your heart is grieving over<br>those who live in pain.<br>Teach us how, by our compassion,<br>you may fashion<br>hope again. | 4 Lord, we set our human limits<br>on the work we do.<br>Send us your directing Spirit,<br>pour your power through,<br>that we may be free in living<br>and in giving<br>all for you.         |

Marjorie Dobson (b. 1940). Words: © 1999 The Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust

### ***Final Prayers***

*Imagine yourself in a sheepfold then read this meditation, slowly, pausing after each line.*

The 'good shepherd' is here; you are one of his beloved sheep.

Listen to his voice – he says... I know my sheep. I know you.

I know you on the outside, and I cherish what I see.

I know you on the inside.

...when you are fearful or anxious, and I long to give you peace.

...when you are vulnerable, and I long to protect you.

...when you are confused, and I long to lead you.

...when you are lost, and I long to find you.

...when you are happy, and I rejoice with you.

I am the 'good shepherd' – come and find pasture.

Now rest in the arms of the Good Shepherd. Go in his peace and his protection, go led by His Spirit into the world and go loved by your heavenly Father. Be empowered to be a good shepherd to a smaller flock. Amen.

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