

Worship at Home for April 25, 2021
Good Shepherd Sunday

You may choose to read right through this document, stopping for your own reflection at any time, or only read the prayers or the scripture or reflection. You might read with family or friends, or alone. Links will take you to music that may enhance your experience as you move through the worship, but you might choose to visit them later, or not at all. Feel free to share this with anyone who might be interested.

In the Spirit

Rev. Joanne

Congregational Territorial Acknowledgment:

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Centering Prayer:

Shepherd God, we enter this time of personal worship
with gratitude for your care.

Open our hearts and minds to the guiding of your Spirit
in our lives today and always. Amen

Opening Music: "All the Way my Saviour Leads Me"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmP-gBewL6I>

Opening Prayer :

God, loving shepherd,
caring companion,
you are ever-present with us
in all of life's adventures.

In this Easter time we celebrate our faith as Easter people,
despite the changes that surround us,
despite the rough landscapes of pandemic times.

You care for us unconditionally,
you love us no matter what,
you seek us out when we feel lost,
and teach us to care for one another
as you care for us.

Guide us, as we worship separately today,
be with us we seek to live a caring and compassionate life,
we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Scripture: Psalm 23

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbGslVeKU_E

John 10:11-18 *The Inclusive Bible*

'I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd would die for the sheep.

The hired hand, who is neither shepherd
nor owner of the sheep,
catches sight of the wolf coming
and runs away,

leaving the sheep to be scattered
or snatched by the wolf.

That's because the hired hand works only for pay,
and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd.

I know my sheep and my sheep know me,
in the same way Abba God knows me
and I know God –

and for those sheep

I will lay down my life.

I have other sheep

that don't belong to this fold -

I must lead them too,

and they will hear my voice.

And then there will be one flock,
one shepherd.

This is why Abba God loves me –

because I lay down my life,
only to take it up again.

No one takes my life from me;

I lay it down freely.

I have power to lay it down,

and I have power to take it up again.

This command I have received from my Abba

Reflection:

I had never met a 'real' shepherd until I was an adult, even though some of my growing-up years were spent in rural Ontario. Like many, my only experience of shepherds had been the towel-and-bathrobe wearing young actors in the nativity plays of my childhood. Of course I had seen pictures of Jesus as shepherd – a very white Jesus sitting in a field or carrying sheep through pastures that were far more like the lands of Southern Ontario than ancient Palestine.

Biblical shepherds were often fairly isolated as they cared for the flocks which were very often both sheep and goats. They were also often the youngest sons in their families that subsisted on agriculture, the job passing from elder to younger as they became old enough to carry out the task, and were considered to be in a humble societal position. Yet notable biblical characters such as Abraham, Moses and of course David – later to become king - were also described as actual shepherds, and many references to the image of God as shepherd are scattered through scripture literally from Genesis to Revelation.

Shepherding was vital work in ancient times, and would have been well known to Jesus' listeners.

What does the image of the shepherd mean to you? Do you have memories that you associate with that image, or recollections of being told the stories of David the shepherd, of Jesus the good shepherd? Can you relate to the image of God as shepherd?

What kind of shepherd do we encounter in this passage today? How does Jesus both describe himself as a shepherd, and mark the difference between himself and others?

Firstly, Jesus declares that he is the 'good' shepherd (from the Greek *kalos* meaning true, proper). The good shepherd is the one that would die for his sheep, but also the one that knows his flock, and whose flock know him. This recognition would have been the hallmark of a good shepherd in Jesus' time, but to imagine that Jesus knows all who follow him, all who need him, is remarkable.

Jesus as good shepherd is not like those others who care only because they are compensated. This distinction was likely referring to those religious authorities who seemed to lack true connection with God and with their faith, perhaps serving for selfish reasons without the willingness to sacrifice. These lines of scripture are not always easy to hear, but can be a good reminder for all of us (and especially those of us in paid, accountable ministry) that our intentions will lead to actions that may affect others. If we are motivated to serve God and one another only because we will receive something in return, we are not practising 'good' shepherding in our lives.

Do you feel called to 'shepherd' others in some way? What would that look like for you?

Jesus tells us that he is also a shepherd that cares for more than just the sheep in his flock – there are others that must be led, must be tended and gathered. We often forget this line in Jesus' description of himself as shepherd – there are others – perhaps unlike us, perhaps unknown to us, but whom Jesus knows and recognizes, and gathers to himself.

Jesus does describe himself as a kind shepherd, a sacrificing shepherd, but also a fierce shepherd. Shepherds carried both rods which could be used to fend off predators, and staffs – sometimes with crooks - for helping them manage the sheep. Imagine Jesus as that fierce shepherd, with rod and staff, turning tables and also reaching out to heal, driving out demons and tenderly weeping with his friends. Imagine him as a shepherd is so fierce that he would give his life for his flock.

Yet is it not logical for the shepherd to die for the flock, is it? Wouldn't that mean that the sheep's death, or the flocks scattering would just be postponed for a little while – until another predator or threat came along? I believe it is important that we read this scripture in the season and in the context of Easter – because Jesus is the Risen One, the shepherd for whom death is not the end, but a gateway to continuing to care for the sheep in a new way. He lays down his life only to take it up again.

Jesus the good shepherd – fierce and tender, caring for all and seeking those who would follow, recognizing us as we recognize him. Jesus the humble yet fierce shepherd, loving and radically giving, even if that giving means his life, with us when times are difficult and dangerous, able to bring us to moments of refreshment at the safe and still waters of life.

May you know this good shepherd, and continue to grow in and through his care. Amen

Music: "Shepherd"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVjedGudN8w>

Prayers of the People:

Today, God, we imagine you as our good shepherd,
and we are grateful that you care for us all –
the big and small, the short and tall.
The sheep who wander and those who stay close.
The black sheep, the lambs, the ewes and the rams.

We thank you, God, for tender care when we are hurting or distressed,
for guidance when we are straying from paths of health and wholeness,
for watchfulness when we are afraid or anxious.

We thank you, God, for those who act as good shepherds in our
families and communities:
for prayer chain members and others who hold us in God's light,
for loved ones who hold us in their hearts,
for health care workers tending to many,
for essential workers and all that they provide.

We lift our prayers for all those who offer themselves and their work
to make our lives safer in so many ways.
We pray for those who grow and process our food-
including modern-day shepherds and farmers.
We pray for those who keep businesses open virtually or physically
so that we can purchase what we need.

Loving and compassionate God, hear us as we pray for those who are
hungry, those who do not have the financial resources to secure housing,
or clothing for themselves and their families. Lead us to loving and
compassionate actions that allow your love and justice, your care –
to be known by all people.

God our Shepherd, you know us, you know our needs and our fears,
and so we pray for ourselves – that we might open ourselves to your care,
that we might be encouraged to live thankfully, that we might live with hope.

We pray in the name of your Good Shepherd – our good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Amen

Closing music: "The King of Love My Shepherd Is"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Au3otElq6D4>

Blessing:

May you move through the pathways of your days knowing that God the shepherd watches over you,
Jesus the good shepherd guides you, and the Spirit of love surrounds you. Amen