

Issue 7
4th May 2020

For these days ...

*'Like a shepherd he
will tend his flock,
And with his arm keep
them together.'*

Isaiah 40.11

Lectionary Readings

Acts 2.42-47

Psalms 23

1 Peter 2.19-25

John 10.1-10

Hymns

555, 'Amazing grace'

540, 'I heard the voice of
Jesus say'

522, 'The Church is
wherever God's people
are praising'

Dear friends, I was really struck this week by the Isaiah quote on the left of this page. It reminded me that even in these days of isolation and physical distancing, we are always united in and through Jesus. We may not be able to physically gather, but we have a Shepherd who is keeping us together. Through his love we are united and are not separate and day-to-day we are finding ways to show that this is true. Through our phone calls and texts, our e-mails and online worship and now through a dial-a-service that allows those without internet access to join us in worship. The number is 0141 278 6595 and callers will only be charged the cost of a local call. Please do pass on this number to those who may wish it. Also, this coming Sunday (10th May) we will be going live on Zoom at 11am – an opportunity for a catch up, one with another. I can't provide the tea or coffee, but I can assure you of a warm welcome *and* the link nearer the time. Do look out for it on our Facebook pages. Last, but by no means least, welcome back to our Pastoral Assistant, Lorraine, who has returned from furlough and please do remember Gillian, our Children and Family Worker, in your thoughts and prayers as she goes into furlough for the next three weeks. As always, stay safe, stay connected and take good care. Love and blessings, Ruth

Prayer

Loving God,
We cannot gather together physically in a building,
but we can, nevertheless, meet in your name,
Confident that we are connected together in and through your love.

For you, Jesus,
Are the one who knows us each by name,
Who loves us no matter what,
And who is always ready to protect and comfort,
Call and guide.

Feeding those who are hungry.
Going in search of those who are lost.

And guiding the footsteps of all who would follow your voice
into the way of abundant living.

Lord Jesus,
When we have strayed,
From the path.

When we have wandered,
From the way.

When we have become lost in things
that cannot truly satisfy or fulfil us,
Remind us of your love,
Remind us that we are forgiven,
And remind us that you are gracious and good
and want nothing but the very best for us,
And then call our names, we pray,
That we might hear your voice, receive new life and follow,
Discovering in all our comings and goings the peace,
joy and hope that you offer,
And share those blessings with one another as we go about our day.
May it always be so,
Amen.

Reading

John 10.1-10

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

10 “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.^[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Reflection

There are many different names for God in the bible. One of the best known is that of Shepherd. It speaks of a God who is vigilant, courageous and loving, ready to feed, look after and care for his sheep. Seeking the lost – those who have wandered, strayed or in danger and ready to save, protect and guide; even if that means laying down his life.

In our gospel passage we find Jesus talking about this good shepherd and his sheep. However, the people he's talking to just don't get it. They are blind to what he is saying, but rather than explain it, he introduces yet another metaphor, one of the I AM sayings found in John: I am the gate. It's the gate that has stayed with me all week.

For, as we have taken our daily walk, quite often we find ourselves in Dalmuir Park and my heart sinks a little as we enter it because I know that very soon we will pass the play park. A place ordinarily filled with children having fun, shouting to one another and laughing – a place bursting with life - a place that Grace loves to play in. She doesn't ask about it anymore. She knows that the gate is closed to keep people safe and whether she understands all of that or not, she accepts it. More so, perhaps, because she knows it won't be closed forever. For we have told her that a day is coming when the gate will be flung open wide and she'll have to wait her turn on the swings and zip slide because it will be bursting with children, full of life.

In our reading today, Jesus says, 'I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved.' It seems like an odd thing to say, until you realise that in Jesus' day, the place of safety at night for sheep was a simple three walled structure with no door or gate. In order to keep the sheep in and safe and keep danger out, the shepherd would lie down across the opening and become, in that act, a gate for the sheep. The one who would let them come and go and move in and out safely – the one who at the end of our reading today promises life.

'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full,' says Jesus. Some translations put it, 'have it abundantly,' or 'more and better life than they ever dreamed of,' or 'life in all its fullness.'

So, what does all this mean? Well, as we come across closed gates at the moment, there to keep us out and safe, the good news is that there is a gate that is always open and leads to life. Abundant life, not characterized by a plentiful supply of toilet roll, pasta or hand wash, or pursued in catalogues, clothes rails, supermarket aisles, or even swing

parks – this life isn't stuff or things. It is found within. The joy and hope that nobody can steal from you. The purpose and peace that passes all understanding. It's there in the pursuit of justice and community and it's centred, absolutely, on love: God's love for us, and our love for God and one another. It can be experienced and known even in this time and in these days, by all those who would receive it; and we don't have to wait for the day when the gate is unlocked. It is already open.

Abundant life, life in all its fullness more and better life than you've ever dreamed of is possible, in so many ways. Every time we find pleasure in simple things. Every time we call or text to let someone know we care. Every time we laugh in the face of adversity. Every time we drop a tin into the food share trolley. Every time we rest in God's love and stay at home trusting that our actions make a difference. Every time we raise a prayer and stay connected with the flock. Every time – well, you can fill in the blank for yourself.

Abundant life. Life in all its fullness. More and better life than you've ever dreamed of is possible. What does that look like for you and are you living it?

Prayer

God,
 If we are honest,
 There are times at the moment when life feels less than full,
 Everything feels as if it is on hold,
 And that we are going through the motions,
 Trying to remember what day it is,
 And waiting for some kind of normality to return.

Yet,
 As we do so,
 Life goes on,
 And so we pray that you would help us embrace each day as a gift,
 Rather than a stop gap to be filled.

May we take time to learn and play,
 Dream and plan,
 Serve and rest,
 Dig and plant,
 Prune and paint,
 Walk and pray,
 Reminisce and wonder,
 Laugh and chat,
 And trust in and through it all
 that you are the gate to life that is always open,

And as we do so,
 May we believe that you want nothing but good for creation,
 As we pray for those who are ill,
 those who nurse and those who worry from a distance,
 those who are scared behind locked doors,
 those who are lonely and anxious,
 Those exhausted and at the end of their tether,
 Those who are grieving,
 Those feeling lost and without hope.

Lord, in the silence, hear our prayers ...

Silence

God,
 In all our safe goings in and out,
 May we your church live abundantly,
 And show in all our caring and giving that you are love,
 offering hope, comfort, protection and peace to all those who need it.
 We ask it all in the name of Jesus,
 Who lay down his life for the world,
 And who taught us to pray together saying:
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ...

Closing thought ...

Go in peace,
 And follow the one that offers life in all its fullness.
 And the blessing of God,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you all,
 This day and forevermore,
 Amen.

Rev Dr Ruth Morrison

RMorrison@churchofscotland.org.uk

0141 941 3317 or 07557657079

Dial-a-service 0141 278 6595