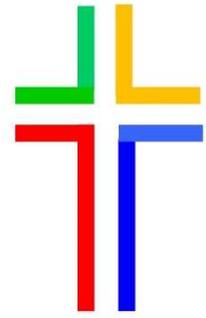


Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 3 May: the gate of the sheep



This week we have inclusions with the Worship Sheet. We have a note from Sophie Doyle, our new Pastoral and Community Worker. We are looking forward to her working among us when normality returns. We are very grateful to Hilary for producing the favourite hymn CD to add to our worship experience in isolation. We look forward to the day when we can meet together again to worship and sing.

PRAYER

Loving Lord, we praise and worship You because Your love surrounds us wherever we are, whatever we may be doing. You speak to our souls and fill our hearts and minds with deep peace. You guide us in the best possible way, knowing what is right for us. Even if our lives are full of difficulties and problems, You are still with

us, helping us to deal with our troubles. Your goodness towards us is like a cup overflowing with the sweetest water. From life's beginning until its end, You will never leave us, and when life is over, we will live with You for ever. Loving Lord, we praise and worship You because Your love surrounds us, now and always. Amen.

READING FOR TODAY John 10;1-10 (NIV)

Jesus the gate of the sheep

'Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's

voice.' ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

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

REFLECTION

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a shepherd as one who 'guards, tends and herds.' Living in the countryside, with some of us having farming and sheep-keeping backgrounds, we probably wouldn't need to go to a dictionary to understand what a shepherd does! Although shepherding was quite different in Biblical times to now; no lambing sheds or quad bikes. But how does this shepherding imagery help us to trust Jesus? In this passage he talks about the differences between a good shepherd and a bad one. A shepherd knows his own sheep by name and leads them out. The sheep follow him because they recognise his voice and trust him. Jesus also uses the analogy of being 'the gate for the sheep'. In his culture, shepherds would protect their flocks by sleeping across the gateway of the sheep pen, fully protective of the sheep inside. Trusting Jesus is possible because we are placing our trust in someone who helps us guard our hearts against trouble and temptation; someone who tends to us, binding and healing our brokenness; someone who leads us forward while all

the time knowing us by name; we are loved, and we can place our trust in the One who truly is good. Very few people today across the UK would have much of a real notion of what shepherding is. When Jesus was speaking, his audience would have known exactly what he meant; it would have been part of their direct experience. If Jesus was telling the story today, I doubt he would have used a shepherd as the image of caring, it would be too remote to people's understanding. So how would have Jesus have updated the image for the present day? Possible ideas: tour guide and tour party? Retreat leader and retreat participants? Exercise class leader and exercisers? Nurse and patients? Perhaps you have some suggestions? It is a tall order of course, because the occupational relationship we choose will need to demonstrate someone who guards; who tends, binds and heals our brokenness; who leads us forward knowing us by name; who loves and cares for us completely. Characteristics that ultimately can only truly exhibited by Jesus. 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.'

HYMN

(H&P 687) Please refer to CD for modern version.

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.
he makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again;
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
even for his own Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me; and thy rod
and staff my comfort still.

My table thou hast furnished
in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me;
and in God's house forevermore
my dwelling place shall be

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

May we who are merely inconvenienced
remember those whose lives are at stake.
May we who have no risk factors
remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working
from home remember those who must
choose between preserving their health
and paying their rent.

May we who are losing our marginal
money in the tumult of the economic
market remember those who have no
margin at all.

May we who have settled in for a
quarantine at home remember those who
have no home.

As fear grips our country, let us choose
love.

And during this time when we may not be
able to physically wrap our arms around
each other, let us yet find ways to be the
loving embrace of God to our neighbours.
Amen.

BLESSING

Lord God, you are always with me.

You are with me in the day and in the
night.

You are with me when I'm happy and
when I'm sad.

You are with me when I'm healthy and
when I am ill.

You are with me when I am peaceful and
when I am worried. Help me to remember
that you love me and are with me in
everything today. Amen.

*"Is prayer your steering wheel or your
spare tyre?" Corrie Ten Boom*