

Sunday Update
25th April 2021

John 10:11-18

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.'

What makes a good leader? That's a big question. It's a question that has been asked over and over again during Covid, as we have analysed the performances of those in positions of leadership and who have been taking decisions on our behalf. With the benefit of hindsight, in time to come, we may come up with a more balanced and insightful view. It's a question that also lies at the heart of parliamentary elections: we are being asked to cast our votes for people who will act as our leaders in the Scottish Parliament, and so are being asked to form opinions on their abilities to lead and to make decisions that will affect all of us. The most important thing in elections is that you cast your vote, and make your opinions known through the ballot box. You will come to different conclusions from me, perhaps, on the values and abilities of those who present themselves for election, and that doesn't matter; what does matter is that we consider these values and abilities and make choices based on these considerations. We choose our leaders. What makes a good leader?

In the Bible, the shepherd is the picture of the leader. The kings of Israel are "*commanded to shepherd my people Israel*" (2 Samuel 7:7) says the Lord. At one stage in the book of Kings, Israel is described as "*scattered... like sheep without a shepherd*" (1 Kings 22:17), a lost and leaderless people. Most of all, the prophet Ezekiel takes aim at the leaders of the people in his day and age and accuses them of taking care only of themselves, rather than looking after the people in their care. They make themselves rich and fat, but don't strengthen the weak or heal the sick, or bring back the strays. "*You have ruled them harshly and brutally.*" (Ezekiel 34:4) Again the flock is scattered, and the leaders are being held accountable for their shortcomings and lack of good leadership. Leadership is about caring for others. On top of all of that, God is described as the Shepherd of Israel, most famously in Psalm 23, but in other places too; He is the One, above all, who leads His people and cares for them; He is the One on whom His people can depend for all that they need.

Jesus takes that picture of the shepherd and applies it to Himself. "*I am the good shepherd.*" (John 10:11) The whole "I am" thing is for another time but suffice to say for now that anyone hearing Jesus use these words "I am" would almost immediately associate them with God; here is Jesus being one with the Father. We've asked what makes a good leader; here's another question: "What makes Jesus the good shepherd?" Today, shepherds drive their flocks in front of them as their sheepdogs guide and control the sheep; you may also need a good quadbike! In Jesus' time, the shepherd walked in front of his sheep, and the sheep followed on behind the shepherd. He called out them, calling each one of them by name and they recognised his voice and followed. Overnight, perhaps three or four flocks were sheltered in the same sheep-fold, protected by a watchman; in the morning, when the

shepherds came, the sheep separated into the right flocks because they recognised *their* shepherds voice; they would not go with someone else.

What makes Jesus the good shepherd? His answer to that question is clear: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."* (John 10:11) "The Palestinian shepherd... planned to live for (the sheep), not die for them... the death of the Palestinian shepherd meant disaster for his sheep. The death of the Good Shepherd means life for His sheep." (Leon Morris) It was Jesus' set purpose to die for His sheep; this was why He came. We've just celebrated Easter with the twin themes of death and resurrection, with the two places of the cross and the empty tomb. This is the heart of Jesus' mission in the world; this is what He came to do. He deliberately put Himself in the way of the cross to die for us. At the heart of the Christian faith stands the huge figure of Jesus Christ, a crucified Saviour and a risen Lord. We find the cross uncomfortable, partly because we don't like people suffering and try to avoid that as much as possible; it's not an easy message to convey, but if we are to represent Jesus faithfully, we have to believe in Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The contrast is with the "hired man". What does the hired man do when things get tough, and danger threatens the sheep that he is looking after? He runs away. The sheep are scattered and lost. He runs away because he *"cares nothing for the sheep."* (John 10:13) We think that the "hired man" in the story is meant to stand for the leaders of the time, both political and religious, men who prided themselves in their position, but cared nothing for the people over whom they exercised leadership. Do we have leaders who care for anyone other than themselves? How can Jesus be a role model of leadership for our leaders today?

"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10) Jesus died that we might have life! It's a strange way to save the world, but that is what God has done; the salvation of the world, "life", comes when the Saviour died and is confirmed when He is raised from the dead. "Life" is "to the full" when it is lived being connected to Jesus by faith. We don't get more for our money at Tesco's; we don't get an immunity from taxes; we don't get a certificate that says we will never be ill; but we do get the promise from Jesus that He will love us endlessly and that He will be with us everywhere we go. The full life that He promises is life lived connected to Jesus, with Jesus at the centre, where Jesus forgives us our sins, listens to our cries for help, and gives us the strength to deal with the hard things of life.

Because He loves us, there are two loves for which He challenges us. The first love He challenges us to have in our hearts is a deep, lasting love for and devotion to God, to centre our lives on God and be the kind of people God wants us to be. The second love is to love other people as He has loved us, that we should care for more than just ourselves. We are called to love and care for others, to seek their welfare, to be kind and generous. Let these two loves shape your life and it will be changed. Of course, that's hard, but let me finish today with a quote from CS Lewis book *The Four Loves* in which he paints a picture of the alternative. "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable."

Prayer: Father, thank You for Jesus and His love; thank You that He is the good shepherd and that His goodness led Him to lay down His life for us. Thank You that in His death is life for us, a life connected

with You by faith, in which You love us and give us everything that we need. Help us to love You with a deep and lasting devotion, a love that loves You heart and soul; help us to love others in the way that Jesus has loved us, with care and compassion for others wherever we meet them.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For people in positions of leadership in our country, to be honest, people of integrity, people who love and care for the people they are given to lead; pray for our politicians, leaders in medicine, education, business, law and order, and the church.
- For the election campaign in Scotland, to be about values and what is important; let it not become a slanging match!
- Earth Day was Thursday, when issues about caring for the planet were raised; pray that we love the planet more and do what it takes to look after it.
- For people who have contracted Covid and are in hospital, that they make a good recovery; those NHS staff who are caring for them, under pressure by the numbers of people in hospital and trying to manage the care they provide.
- For people who mourn because a loved one has died; help them to find comfort and peace; for the process of grief that goes on and those who feel the effects of lockdown on their deepest emotions and feelings of loss.
- For the roll-out of the vaccine to be efficient and effective, reaching the people who need it most; for those waiting for the letter; for the vaccine to make people safe, as promised.
- For the opening-up of things after lockdown; more businesses opening on April 26th and travel becoming less restricted; all children have gone back to school full-time; continue to pray for safety and for good health for the population, that there will be no more spikes in the virus and that people will behave responsibly.
- For people who are still isolating, still spending time on their own again and feeling afraid; for people in care homes, beginning to meet family again, and the staff who care for them.
- For schools: pupils and teachers back full-time; for pupils to settle back down to a routine and to stay safe; for teachers who are trying to manage classes as well as teach and catch up with lost work.
- For communities and businesses: the pubs and hotels and others preparing to open again this week; for those who own these businesses and it is their livelihood; for those who work and are still on furlough; for the gaps left in the social interaction of many people, adding to their sense of isolation.
- For Churches, some buildings open and some still closed; help them to care for all of their people; may the technology be a lifeline for lots of people; help churches across Scotland to be a light in their community and share the light of Jesus with others.
- For people we know...
- This week, take time to think about these words and pray them into your own heart: *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1 John 3:16)*

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love.

In Christ alone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16KYvflc2bE>

At the Name of Jesus
The King of love my shepherd is
[YouTube](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI2rKRCWmOU>
[DOMINUS REGIT ME-THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS -](#)

He is Lord
I the Lord of sea and sky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTbhnTeF4yE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zr9SMm1gll>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, a tablet or an i-pad, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - NEW ISSUES. The next issue of “EVERY DAY WITH JESUS” Booklet for May and June 2021 is now available. If you desire a copy please contact Ian Aitken.

Also, available is the next issue of the “WORD FOR TODAY” Booklet and “WORD FOR YOU TODAY” Booklet for Young People for May, June, and July 2021. If you desire a copy, please contact Michael Merriman.

Let the Bible feed you.

Try Praying - the final total reached was £350; thanks for your donations.

The Good Shepherd

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

The Lord is my good shepherd – and yours.
The Shepherd knows you –and he knows me.
Come and walk with him beside still waters.
Come and have your soul restored.

Thank you, Jesus, that we are your sheep;
that you care for us – awake or asleep;
that you know us as we grow day by day;
and for watching over us in work, rest and
play.

Amen.



Question...



What do shepherds do? What is their job?

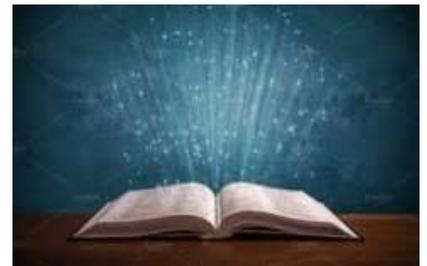
Who cares for you?

A verse to remember...

Psalm 23:1

“The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.”

Try and learn this verse together. Write it on a piece of card and put it up somewhere you'll see it throughout the week.



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in John 10:11-18. You can read them in a Bible or find them [here](#). Here's another version you could read: <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/media/22266/easter-4-present-the-reading.pdf>.

Or try reading the story with actions. Every time you hear sheep- baa and crawl around. When you hear shepherd – look around and pretend to count sheep. At the word wolf – make ears with your hands and howl!

Talk together...

Sheep can't protect themselves very well, they need a shepherd to care for them. The shepherd protects them from danger and leads them to places where they find food and water. He makes sure the sheep are happy and safe. They follow the shepherd's voice. Jesus says that he is the good shepherd to us.

- What does "care" look like to you?
- Is there anyone you care for? How do you care for them, what do you do or say?
- Does it ever 'cost' anything to care for someone/a group of people?
- How has/does Jesus demonstrate he is a good shepherd? Did it 'cost' Jesus anything?
- What communities are you part of eg. Family, school, church, clubs, local area etc.
- What kind of needs might there be in these places?
- How do we care for others in our communities?



Play together...

Good shepherd game: Pick one person to be the shepherd. Invite them to take a good look at the sheep (that's everyone else!) then leave the room for a few moments.

While they're out of the room, change something about one or two of the sheep, eg. Put a jumper on back to front, remove a hairband, cross your arms or legs.

Invite the shepherd back and see if they can spot the changes in their flock.

You can repeat this game with others having a chance to be the shepherd.

Pray together...

Loving God, thank you for always being with us and for leading us like a shepherd. Thank you that you care for us so much you were willing to die so that we could live. Thank you for giving us everything we need like
God you are and we praise you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Make something...

Sheep biscuits. You'll need: a biscuit, mini marshmallows, green icing, raisins or chocolate chips and something to make the legs such as pretzel sticks or chocolate Matchmakers.

- Cover the biscuit in icing
- Use marshmallows to create a sheep (don't forget to give it a head!)
- Give it a raisin/chocolate chip ear and 4 stick legs.
- If you have cake decorating pens or writing icing then you could give it a face.

You might want to add a jelly baby shepherd. If you don't have marshmallows use rice krispies or coco pops or even desiccated coconut instead. You could try to make a savory sheep instead using a rice cake/cracker, guacamole and cooked rice? Be creative!



Praise together...



[Reckless love](#)

[The Lord's my shepherd](#)

[God, you're good to me](#)