

Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit

Worship at Home: Sunday 8th May 2022
Fourth Sunday of Easter

This Service was prepared by Graham Hepburn.

Welcome and Preparation

Our service today is based around the set Lectionary Psalm for this Sunday, Psalm 23.

'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.' (Ps 23 v 6)

Listen, read, pray or sing along

Do you have a favourite Easter hymn which you haven't heard or sung this year? Please feel free to read or sing those words now in place of my choice.

Low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Saviour,
(StF 305)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kown2rxc0M>

1. Low In the grave he lay,
Jesus, my Saviour,
Waiting the coming ay,
Jesus, my Lord:

*(Refrain) Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And he lives for ever with his saints to reign
He arose! He arose!
Alleluia! Christ arose!*

2. Vainly they watch his bed,
Jesus, my Saviour;
Vainly they seal the dead,
Jesus, my Lord:
(Refrain)

3. Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Saviour;
He tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord
(Refrain)

Robert Lowry (1826-1899)

Opening Prayers taken from 'A Place For All,' 2021/22 Methodist Prayer Handbook)

God of all, if only we could see other people with your eyes!

Not strange, incomprehensible, alien or threatening but part of our family.

Not to be kept behind a barrier, treated with caution or held at arm's length, but to be invited in, welcomed and truly listened to, because this is our family, and you are our Father. Amen

Hospitable God, when we have made the Church a closed place, where only those who know the unwritten rules are welcome:

forgive us and enlarge our hearts.

When we have made our minds a closed place, where only those who think as we do are welcome:

forgive us and enlarge our hearts.

When we have made our hearts a closed place, where only those who love as we do are welcome:

forgive us and enlarge our hearts.

Thank you for loving us as we are and for calling us to grow into the image of your Son, in whose name we pray. **Amen**

Bible Readings

Psalm 23

Revelation 7 v 9-17

Reflection (1)

Carla A Grosch-Miller is a minister in the United Reformed Church. She contributes to 'Fresh From the Word', the IBRA Bible reading notes to which I subscribe. I always find her contributions to be insightful and thought provoking. That led me to her other work, including her versions of the Psalms, 'Psalms Redux', and her version of Psalm 23 is below. Biblical passages like Psalm 23 can sometimes lose their meaning and impact through our overfamiliarity with them so I find it especially helpful to read a different version.

Psalm 23 Redux

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(This has been removed from the text as copyright permission was only for 2 weeks from 8 May. If you wish to see this version, please contact Graham Hepburn.)

The set Gospel and New Testament lessons today are John 10 v 22-30 (Jesus being questioned about if he is the Christ, and responding, "I and the Father are one"), and Acts 9 v 36-43 (Peter restoring Dorcas/Tabitha to life), but it was the link between the much loved Psalm 23 and the lesson from Revelation which attracted my attention.

Psalm 23 verse 5, tells us *'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.'* Revelation 7 verse 16 reads *'They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.'* Verse 17 continues *'he will guide them to springs of living water.'*

Most if not all of us will have taken great comfort from the security of the words in Psalm 23 at some time during our lives. The Biblical view of the shepherd, the carer, the protector, the saviour of his flock, is one we are so familiar with. Because the Lord is my shepherd, I will lack for nothing. All my wants will be provided for, physical, spiritual, emotional.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray for enough to be provided to enable us to survive for today, because each day has enough worries of its own and can take care of itself. Let's worry about tomorrow when the time comes. But Psalm 23 tells us that our cup is not just full enough for today, to provide for our needs, but is so full that it is overflowing. Like the sight you used to see of someone overfilling their car petrol tank to get the amount to the next full pound (not a sight you see nowadays!), or the sight of a watering can you have left filling and the water has come over the top before you get back to it.

This is not the feeling of so many in our society today, even though we remain one of the richest countries in the world. For many, the cup, and the plate, and the cupboard, are bare, and theirs and their children's stomachs are empty. It's a reminder that we need to have all our needs met, and if only one or two of the three needs I mentioned above - physical, emotional, spiritual - is being met, that is not enough. Both for us, and for those who we are called to come into the presence of, with whom we share our lives with as our families, our friends, and our neighbours. The needs that used to be highlighted as famines overseas are now in every neighbourhood on our doorsteps.

In Revelation, St John gives us this view of a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation (what is the largest crowd you have ever been in?), praising God and the Lamb, along with the angels. One of the elders talks to the author, who tells him the great multitude are those who have come out the great tribulation - and that they shall hunger and thirst no more. They will be guided by the Lamb to streams of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. This gives me a reminder of the words of Jesus about living water, both in the meeting at the well with the woman of Samaria, (John 4) and the words of Jesus recorded for us in John 7 v 37-39.

Whatever the sufferings on earth, John gives us this picture of eternal praise and reward in heaven. This vast crowd, many of whose lives were worthless in the eyes of the world, now come to God and share with Jesus in his triumph, the triumph that we celebrate because of Christ's victory over death at Easter.

We can relate this tribulation to the persecution of Christians, both when John was writing, and through the centuries to the present day. Also, we can relate this to those living out their faith despite pain, fear, loss or injustice, and who despite all that, continue to go on trusting God even in the harshest of situations. For them, and for us, we take up this vision of the all-embracing love of God and the Lamb, in a place beyond all the suffering of our world - no racism, no division,

no strife, no hunger, but victory over all those evils in eternal life.

Let us pray

'O divine shepherd, you satisfy the hunger and thirst of my body and soul.

Help me to praise you, even in the midst of difficulties' Amen (Salvador T Martinez, IBRA)

Reflection (2)

David wrote this psalm about a shepherd, which of course was his profession before the Lord called him to lead his nation, as warrior and king. Can you write a short, six verse psalm like this, based on your previous or current profession?

Listen, read, pray or sing along

We're all very familiar with the traditional hymn versions of Psalm 23,

The King of love my shepherd is (StF 479), or

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want (StF 480),

but I have chosen Stuart Townend's version,

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want (StF 481),

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

1. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want,
he makes me lie in pastures green,
he leads me by, the still still waters,
his goodness restores my soul.

*(Refrain) And I will trust In you alone,
yes I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

2. He guides my way, in righteousness,
and he anoints, my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delight.

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.

*And I will trust in you alone,
yes I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

Stuart Townend (b1963)

Prayers of Intercession.

Lord God, our Good Shepherd, we pray that you will provide and care for all your people.

We pray for those facing suffering, war, oppression, remembering especially the people of Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen, and the Middle east. Grant them the faith to believe that they do have a today and a tomorrow, and hope for their future. We pray for all who work for peace, locally, nationally, internationally, both personally and through larger organisations.

Give them all the vision of your green pastures, and the sure knowledge of your ongoing love and care for them.

We pray for all who need their souls to be restored, and for those who work to do so. For all facing doubt and uncertainty in their faith, for all who find things are not as simple and straightforward as they used to be. For all faith leaders, both in our community and nationally.

Give them all the vision of your green pastures, and the sure knowledge of your ongoing love and care for them.

We pray for those walking through the valley of the shadow of death. We remember especially those who know that the diagnosis of their illness is terminal, and worry about their family who will be left when they are gone.

Give them all the vision of your green pastures, and the sure knowledge of your ongoing love and care for them.

Wherever we are, may we know that you are the Good Shepherd. Even in the city, among the valleys of the tower blocks and by the streams of endless traffic, may we know your caring presence. We pray for all whose lives and cupboards are empty, and can only dream of a cup overflowing, with love, with compassion, with food and drink, with hope.

Give them all the vision of your green pastures, and the sure knowledge of your ongoing love and care for them.

The Lord's Prayer

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

If you give your weekly offering through an envelope scheme or in cash, please set it aside, and pray with those who give using Standing orders.

Gracious God, accept these gifts, and with them our lives, to be used in mission and service through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Listen, read, pray or sing along

Isaac Watts great hymn, based on our lesson from Revelation. I like the personal touch in verse 3, making himself a witness to this part of St. John's Revelation.

Give me the wings of faith to rise (StF 747)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b98AB9i9U90>

1 Give me the wings of faith to rise
within the veil, and see
the saints above, how great their joys,
how bright their glories be.

2 Once they were mourners here below,
and poured out cries and tears:
they wrestled hard, as we do now,
with sins and doubts and fears.

3 I ask them whence their victory came:
they, with united breath,
ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
their triumph to his death.

4 They marked the footsteps that he trod;
his zeal inspired their breast;
and, following their incarnate God,
possess the promised rest.

5 Our glorious Leader claims our praise
for his own pattern given;
while the long cloud of witnesses
show the same path to heaven.

Isaac Watts (1764-1748)

Blessing

May the blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you now, and for evermore. Amen.