Home Service Sheet 30th April 2023

Call To Worship  Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

     He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

     He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

    for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

    I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

    your rod and your staff,

    they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

    in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

    my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

    all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord

    forever.

Opening Prayer

Loving God I acknowledge today that you are my shepherd. You care for me, love me and protect me from harm. I am yours and your very presence with me comforts me. Remind me today of the ways in which you have guided me and helped me to listen to your voice through the words of Scripture. Help me to hear your voice today as I read the Bible, and help me to obedient to you in all parts of my life. Assist me to praise you as you deserve, and keep me following you all the days of my life. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Hymn The King of Love by Henry Williams Baker

<https://youtu.be/zNnuM1Z8FzI>

1 The King of love my Shepherd is, 2 Where streams of living water flow

Whose goodness faileth never; My ransomed soul He leadeth,

I nothing lack if I am His, And, where the verdant pastures grow,

And He is mine forever. With food celestial feedeth.

3 Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, 4 In death’s dark vale I fear no ill

But yet in love He sought me, With Thee, dear Lord, beside me;

And on His shoulder gently laid, Thy rod and staff my comfort still,

And home rejoicing brought me. Thy Cross before to guide me.

5 Thou spread’st a table in my sight; 6 And so through all the length of days

Thy unction grace bestoweth; Thy goodness faileth never;

And oh, what transport of delight Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise

From Thy pure chalice floweth! Within Thy house forever.

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, amen.

Bible Reading John 10:1-15

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Reflection

Throughout the Scriptures God describes Himself as a Shepherd on a number of occasions. Clearly it is an important image that helps us to understand what God is like, and how He relates to us as His people. Living, as we do, in modern urban Britain, it’s not perhaps the easiest of pictures for us to fully understand. Some years ago, a shepherd named Philip Keller wrote devotional books about both Psalm 23 and the passage from John’s Gospel where Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd, that we are looking at today. Keller used his own experiences as a shepherd to bring out the significance of the details in both of these Biblical passages.

In England today most, if not all, shepherds will sleep in their own beds in their own houses at night, but this certainly wouldn’t have been the case for shepherds in Ancient Israel. They would have stayed with their flocks all the time, day and night. They would typically corral their sheep into a pen and sleep in the gateway so that anyone wanting to get to the sheep would have to go through them first. This image is clearly seen in our Bible reading from John’s Gospel where Jesus says, “I am the door of the sheep” (v.7). Those who try to get the sheep by another means are described as thieves and robbers, and is from them that Jesus will protect His people. This points us to the wonderful reality of God’s care for us. No-one can get to us and snatch away our salvation if we are truly in Christ!

Sheep are neither the most obedient nor cleverest of creatures. In fact, they have a habit of getting themselves into all kinds of trouble imaginable, often in search for grass outside of their allocated pasture. God is our Shepherd and we, the sheep, need to listen obediently to His voice. The reality is that we, like sheep, can get into the worst kind of situations when we don’t listen to God’s Word that He has given to us in the Bible. By ignoring or disobeying God’s Word we place ourselves above God, and make an idol of our own intellect and so-called ‘wisdom’, which is truly no wisdom at all! God has made us, sustained us and guided us throughout our lives. It is He who knows what we need, just as the shepherd knows best what his sheep need, even if they don’t always like it! We need to trust the Lord, our Shepherd!

At the very heart of our reading Jesus says this, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (vv.10-11) Jesus reveals that His purpose in coming to this world was to give us life, everlasting life. Some try to twist this verse to suggest that God wants us to be materially prosperous, but that is not what Jesus is saying. He laid down His life for us at the cross, and died to pay the price for our sins that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God the Father and adopted into His family for eternity as sons and daughters. This is ‘abundant life’, and this is what Jesus offers to all who have faith in Him.

Elsewhere in Scripture the Prophet Isaiah wrote of the effect of Jesus’ death on the cross, ‘with his wounds we are healed’ (Isaiah 53:5). What is meant by this phrase, which is quoted a few times in the New Testament, is discovered by reading it in context. It is about us being made right with God through Jesus’ death on the cross, and not about our physical health. Sadly, though, it is another of those Biblical phrases or verses that is twisted and misused by some people to lead them astray. These are the kinds of thieves and bandits of whom Jesus speaks in John 10.

Jesus also speaks of hired hands who came before Him. They did not stand firm when wild animals came to attack the sheep, the people of Israel. These were the rulers who ultimately rebelled against God and His ways, and it is clear that we are not to be like them. God alone is our Shepherd, and those of us called into leadership within His Church are simply under-shepherds who seek to do what the Good Shepherd has taught us to do in His Word to love and protect His sheep. Let us all be those who look to the great Shepherd of the sheep who gave Himself for us, cares for us and loves us so much. May we hear His voice and obey it. Amen!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You that You sent Your Son, Jesus to be our Good Shepherd. It was He who laid down His life for Your sheep, so that we might live with You forever, and for that we thank You. Through Him, we can be restored into fellowship with You. Give us understanding, we pray, so that we may come to know You better each day. Father, thank You that Jesus is all we need for life and godliness. Thank You that in Him are the words of eternal life and that He is the Good Shepherd of the sheep and the singular Door into the sheepfold. Thank You that in Him we have been made Your sons and daughters and that the many promises of God are ours, through faith in Him - not only in this world but in the age to come. May we each live and work to Your praise and glory. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Benediction

May the God of peace who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and who made an eternal covenant with His blood; may He equip us with all we need for doing His will. May He produce in us, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to Him. All glory be to him forever and ever! Amen.