

SUNDAY APRIL 25TH 2021

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER.

About today's Readings

King David, while still a boy, saw close links between his life as a shepherd caring for his sheep, and the care which God has for his people. Hence "The Lord is my shepherd - I shall not want" - words which David wrote as the beginning of the twenty-third Psalm. Many centuries later, Jesus spoke of himself as being "The Good Shepherd". Today we are reminded of this, and of his invitation to each one of us to know him and to follow him more closely.

Shepherding was very different in Bible times, from shepherding of today. Shepherds did not "drive" their sheep - they walked with them, or they went ahead of them if the path was narrow or steep or dangerous. Shepherds knew each one of their sheep individually. Sometimes they had named every one of their sheep: they did not think that they all looked the same or all **were** the same. Shepherds understood the individual needs of each sheep.

If a wolf appeared, the shepherd would see it off. And the sheep, in turn, knew their shepherd, and trusted that - far from trying to control them or take away their freedom - he was protecting them, and he was also expanding their horizons. The springtime grass which carpeted the Judaeian hillsides soon turned brown, so the shepherds kept on leading their sheep to fresh and green pasture. When the time came to move on, they would call their sheep, and the sheep - hearing the call, and hearing their names - would come willingly. Waiting for the stragglers, the shepherd set off, and wherever he went, the sheep would be sure to follow.

Jesus describes himself as being that kind of a shepherd. He wishes to lead us to where he knows we will find personal nourishment and fulfilment. He wishes us to be safe from dangers. We are known to him as individuals. We can trust him, because we know that he gave his life for us. No-one made him do that: he did it because he loves us. And **that** is the difference between a "job" and a "vocation" - the feeling of being called to do something; doing it because you care; not looking for rewards or recognition, just wanting to give, and to put others first and self last.

For us here and now, we are invited to see Jesus - our own Good Shepherd - as the one who knows us best - who knows us better even than we know ourselves, and who, despite our shortcomings, loves and upholds each one of us as individuals. He does not force or manipulate us into what we should be or what we should do - he invites. He does not "drive" - he leads. Occasionally, too, he picks us up and carries us. And if we can see and accept all this, then we reach the beginnings of an understanding that we **all** have a vocation to be like Jesus - to be like the Good Shepherd. And we may be priests or nurses or teachers or engineers or parents ... or whatever ... but to whatever service and vocation God has called us, it is only our likeness to Jesus the Good Shepherd which makes **us** "good".

Some prayers for today, and for the week ahead.

We give thanks for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; and we pray that the model of Christ the Good Shepherd may inspire us to be good shepherds to others, and good stewards of God's creation. We pray that we may gladly accept the invitation of the Good Shepherd to know him and to follow him more closely; and we give thanks for the numerous ways in which we are led, loved, cared-for and upheld by the risen Lord, the Good Shepherd.

We pray for ELIZABETH our Queen as our Sovereign and Head of State; and we pray for all in authority under her; for all in public life and in positions of influence and power; and for all who are driving the political and the medical agendas for us, and for our country and for the wider world. We give thanks for the Queen's recent 95th Birthday, and we pray that she will receive comfort and strength to face her bereavement, and to continue with her duties.

We pray that those who exercise power and authority over others may always serve, and never exploit - and never neglect or abuse those who look to them for protection. And we pray that all people who feel marginalized or lost or left-behind, may experience the same care which the Good Shepherd has for his sheep. We also pray that those who are anxious for the future may find themselves guided and led forward, as they seek to discover their opportunities for education or employment, or for the general direction of their lives.

We pray for a speedy and appropriate sending of a new Priest to take the pastoral charge of our parish; for all who will now be involved in the process of discerning and appointing; and for a readiness to welcome that person.

We pray that our country, and the wider world, will become increasingly less restricted, and increasingly more in control of the Covid Pandemic. We pray for control and restraint, too, as people begin to embrace the relaxation of restrictions; and we ask that this may be tackled in ways which are orderly, courteous, thoughtful and careful.

We pray for the sick: Anne Barber, Beth Beecham, Gerry Bond, Anne Carter, Lizzie Checkley, Carole Cresswell, Janet Dann, Peter Davey, Sue Davis, Carolyn Drew, Julie Evans, Kieran Hooper, Jill, Rene Leufgen, Jack Luscombe, Stephen Luscombe, Jackie Lynch, Mike Hammett, Pamela Macey, Diane Squires, Kathryn Tregenna, Lena Tucker, Verity, Duncan Walters and Rita White.

We pray for those who have died recently, including those who have died of the Covid-19 Pandemic locally here, and also in any part of the world. We remember Christopher Daunton (Exeter) and Thomas Houghton (Torquay), whose funerals have recently taken place. And we also pray for those whose anniversary of death falls at this time, among them Edna Ferris (1995) and Mike Matthews (2011).