

St Peter's Scottish Episcopal Church, Kirkcaldy



Sunday 25th April 2021, Easter 4

Introit Hymn: Praise my soul the king of heaven

Welcome: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Collect for Purity: **Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Gloria: **Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Collect: O God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do your will, and work in us that which is well-pleasing in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Collect SPB: Almighty God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they might return into the way of righteousness: Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

First reading: Acts 4. 5-12 (SPB 1 St Peter 2.19)

Second reading: 1 John 3. 16-24

Gradual hymn: King of glory, king of peace

Gospel acclamation: **Alleluia! Alleluia! I am the good shepherd, says the Lord; I know my own sheep and my own know me. Alleluia!**

Gospel: John 10. 11-18 (SPB St John 16.16)

When gospel is announced:
Glory to Christ our Saviour.

At end:
Give thanks to the Lord for his glorious Gospel.
Praise to Christ our Lord.

Homily:

Today's gospel text uses an image that may be lost on many of us, an image that we may know from childhood stories — but not firsthand experience. Jesus, living in the first century, talking to people who know livestock and agriculture in their hearts and bones, tells his disciples, his friends, us, that he is the Good Shepherd.

We hear this story, or parts of it, year after year, on the Fourth Sunday of Easter. We hear it when Jesus has not only laid down his life for his friends, but has taken it back up, defeating death, sin, and the grave. His disciples hear it before Jesus has even gotten back to Jerusalem. The disciples are where they were through all of Lent — hearing Jesus predict his death, in disbelief at it, and somewhat perplexed. They don't think he's going to die. We know he's died and risen again.

Our text today is the second half of Jesus' describing himself as the Good Shepherd, a story split in two over the course of church years. Today, Jesus makes the distinction between himself, the Good Shepherd, and the hired hand. "The Good Shepherd," Jesus says, "is willing to die. They'll get down with the sheep even when the wolf comes. They'll give up their own life to save the sheep."

He contrasts this with the hired hand, someone whose work is seasonal but who isn't invested in the sheep or the property. "The hired hand," Jesus says, "says, 'I'm not waiting around!' when the wolf comes." The hired hand's work is probably temporary anyway, depending on the season and need. Why would they stick around when a wolf comes? Depending on the shepherd's fairness and practices, there may not have been any guarantee that they would be paid. When a wolf comes with no human to guard against it, that leaves the sheep scattered — or worse, gobbled up.

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." This second half of Jesus' Good Shepherd narrative is remarkably tender, vulnerable, and human. Shepherds were dirty, hungry, and scrappy. They lived out mostly on their own with a vast responsibility. Their only company was sheep, and they had to learn to love them.

Jesus is telling his disciples then and now that this is how he cares for us. He's not a leader who is around just long enough to get paid. He's not there to just do the easy work. Jesus the Good Shepherd has come to offer salvation: salvation through love, self-giving, tenderness, and vulnerability.

Before the plot, his trial, his execution, or his resurrection, Jesus tells the disciples that he lays his life down for his sheep. He protects them from the wolves. He brings them life. He tells his disciples, too, that there are other sheep to which he must attend, others who follow him, but that aren't a part of the fold they know, the fold of which they are part.

Before our passage today, Jesus has just told the disciples that he is the gate, the pathway for attaining salvation — and tells them even still they don't know it all. He will attend to these other sheep and there will be one flock, one people who have been brought to salvation. Jesus the Good Shepherd doesn't give his disciples directions right now on who is in or who is out. He doesn't give a timeline for when this one flock will be achieved. What he says more than once, though, is that those who are his know him, and he knows them. He says that he loves them, and that he lays down his life for them.

Jesus is giving his disciples an Easter message before he's even been crucified. "I lay down my life in order to take it up again... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." Jesus the Good Shepherd doesn't run from the wolves, he gets in the muck with the sheep and loves us. We started learning about that when God became human and let Godself be bound to our earthly, fleshy limitations.

He holds us close to his chest or lets us lean on him when we need to be held and touched, and he faces the greatest enemy we have: death. He does by his own will, not because he's compelled to. He does it from his desire, not to satisfy a blood necessity. He does it on his own, not to appease the Creator's wrath. "For this reason the Father loves me," Jesus says, "because I lay down my life in order to take it up again."

Jesus lays down his life and takes it up again. He beats death, hell, and the grave, all the wolves we'll ever face, and the adversary — Satan — himself. Jesus lays down his life and takes it up again, alleluia! Jesus the Good Shepherd loves his own, loving them to the point of death — and loving them even through death, to raise them from death, to bring salvation.

Jesus the Good Shepherd isn't a Precious Moments painting or collectible, however sweet that may feel or seem. Love — love enough to lay down one's life and take it back up again — isn't only sweet and it isn't only a moment. It's earthy and dirty. It's dangerous and deadly. But this is Jesus the resurrected Christ, alleluia. The Good Shepherd who knows his own, whose own know him, who lays down his life for them — even when the hired hand won't.

Jesus the Good Shepherd is tender, affectionate, and vulnerable. As he tends to us in Bread and Wine, getting back into the physical, touchable reality of humanity — like a shepherd in the wild fields — he joins us to his life, his life that he laid down and took back up. Jesus the Good Shepherd knows us as his own, and we know him. Amen.

Nicene Creed:

**We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one substance with the Father. Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven;
by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father.
With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.
Amen.**

Intercessions:
Group

Composed and prayed on behalf of the congregation by a member of the Intercessors

Dear Father, through your Son, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, you have led us from darkness into glorious light, from death to life eternal. We give you thanks and praise for Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Help us to hear his voice and to follow him. We remember all bishops, especially our own Bishop Ian, who lead their flock. We pray for Christine and all our faithful worshippers at St Peter's and around the world. Bless all who teach us the faith and help us to walk the way of holiness.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall fear no evil.

We give thanks for all who seek to bring peace and unity to our troubled world. We pray for all peoples caught up in the fighting and unrest. We pray that leaders will work to overcome this hatred and division. We ask your blessing on all carers, doctors, nurses and home helpers. We remember those who reach out to the less fortunate, the homeless, the addicts, those living in poverty, the lonely.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall fear no evil.

We give thanks for the safety and comfort of our homes. We ask you to protect our loved ones and guide them in the ways of peace. We thank you for those who have worked tirelessly to help us through this pandemic. We give thanks for those scientists who have produced the vaccines to help overcome this terrible virus.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall fear no evil.

We pray for those who are in hospital and all who are ill at home. We especially remember Hilary Barrett and Sheila Brown, also holding those people who are shielding at this time in our prayers. Give them the strength of mind to face the days ahead, knowing that you are with them always.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall fear no evil.

Good and gracious Lord, you have rescued us from the darkness of death and opened for us the way of eternal life. We bring before you all our friends and loved ones who are now with you in your eternal kingdom. In our Year's Mind we recall the lives of Frederick Hubbard, Joyce Wall, Alexander Rennie, Peggy & Harold Wood. Grant them your love and light.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall fear no evil.

Risen Christ, come, raise the fallen, strengthen the weak, support the weary. Give peace to the troubled, comfort to the anxious. Uplift all who are down, grant them wholeness and healing. Risen Christ, Shepherd of the sheep, be with us, now and forever.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

AMEN

Confession

and Absolution:

God is love and we are his children. There is no room for fear in love.
We love because he loved us first. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Silence

**God our Father, we confess to you
and to our fellow members in the Body of Christ
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed,
and in what we have failed to do.**

We are truly sorry.

**Forgive us our sins,
and deliver us from the power of evil.**

**For the sake of your Son who died for us,
Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

(May) God, who is both power and love, forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Peace:

We meet in Christ's Name let us share his peace.

Offertory hymn:

Father of heaven whose love profound

Communion Prayer:

God of infinite mercy. We thank you for Jesus our Saviour who feeds his people and gives them eternal life. Though we cannot consume the gifts of

bread and wine we thank you that we do receive Christ's saving presence, the forgiveness of sins and all other benefits of his passion. Grant that we may continue for ever in the risen and ascended life of our Saviour. Amen.
(This prayer is said during the online Provincial service).

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 who 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.**

Communion hymn: And now, O Father mindful of the love

Concluding Prayer: **God of steadfast love, watch over the Church redeemed by the blood of your Son. May we who share in these holy mysteries come safely to your eternal kingdom, where there is one flock and one shepherd. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ the risen Lord. Amen.**

Blessing: The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen**

Dismissal: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Recessional hymn: O for a thousand tongues to sing

7pm Candle Prayer

**Living God,
Your word to us through the Risen Lord is:
Peace be with you.
Amidst the disturbance of the times,
May we hear your word and embrace the peace you offer.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.**

**Living God,
Your word to us through the Risen Lord is:
Peace be with you.
When the foundations are shaken and the certainties no longer sure,
May you speak to us in the still small voice of calm.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.**

**Living God,
Your word to us through the Risen Lord is:
Peace be with you.
When we are fearful and troubled,
May you speak to the depths of our fears and still our troubled hearts.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.**

**Living God,
Your word to us through the Risen Lord is:
Peace be with you.
As we hear his voice,
May we reach out to the One whose presence is renewed and revealed before us.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.**

**Living God,
Your word to us through the Risen Lord is:
Peace be with you.
As we experience the renewal of life within our family and community,
May we bear witness to your abiding presence among us.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.**

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