

# Sunday 30 April 2023, Christ Church Rayleigh

## Call to Worship (based on Psalm 23)

We gather together to worship and praise our 'Good Shepherd', who cares so well for us.

The Lord is our Shepherd, and we have all we are ever likely to need.

We gather together to worship and praise our 'Good Shepherd', who safely leads us and gives us strength for the journey.

The Lord is our Shepherd, who allows us to rest and who renews our energies.

We gather together to worship and praise our 'Good Shepherd', who offers us a feast when we are under pressure.

The Lord is our Shepherd, who's unfailing love is always there waiting for us. Amen.

**Hymn** The Lord's my shepherd Red folder 90

**Children's time** - sheep

## Gifts

May the offerings brought this day be used as seeds, planted faithfully and nurtured lovingly

so that God's way may be realized anew in this world.

Grant us the humility we need to plant and then tend your precious garden.

## Bible Reading: Psalm 23

Today, rather than one sermon, we are going to have some shorter devotions and prayers with some actions and time for reflection.

We have just heard Psalm 23, which we also sang and used in our call to worship. It is undoubtedly the best-known psalm and one of the best-known parts of the Bible, with even non-church goers often knowing it. - John Bell p21 reasons for its popularity.- In a few moments of silence you may like to reflect on what psalm 23 means to you.

Before we pray we sing the Taize chant, O Lord hear my prayer three times.

The image shows a musical score for a Taize chant. It consists of two systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system has the following lyrics: "O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer. When I call". The second system has the following lyrics: "an-swer me. O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer. Come and lis-ten to me. O". Above the first system, the chords Em, C6, D, G/B, and C are indicated. Above the second system, the chords Am6, B, Em, C6, D, G6, Am, B, and Em are indicated.

Gentle Shepherd: Thank you for the way you have led us to green pastures and still water; you've shown us beauty this week that has fed our souls.

The amazing flowers of blossoming trees glowing in the morning sun

the delicate symphony the birds sing each morning  
the caress of the warm sun on our upraised cheeks, the fragrance of lilac in the evening.

Some of us have walked through dark valleys this week,  
and all of us know someone in a dark valley,  
valleys of sickness, grief, uncertainty, fear.  
You meet us there in the darkness, you protect us.  
Our enemies are present in our lives; forces that would take us away from you.  
Pride, envy, hatred, selfishness, all played out on an individual and corporate level.

You have provided for our basic needs this week,  
thank you for the food we've eaten, for the luxury of variety in our diet,  
for the joy of cooking, for the clean water that comes out of our taps.

You anoint us with oil, you gift us with grace,  
providing unexpected blessings over and over,  
encouragement and new strength when we falter  
tender compassion when we are spent.  
Goodness and mercy is following us all the days of our lives.  
We give thanks for this good life,  
for life and breath this day, a day to praise and thank you,  
we want to stay in your Presence forever. Amen.

**Hymn** What a friend we have in Jesus R&S 413

**Reflection from the UCC, by Molly Baskette**

Jeremiah 7:23-24 (NRSV) "Thus says the Lord of hosts: This command I gave them, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you." Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward."

A lot of us claim to believe in God, but then act as if everything depends on us, on our efforts and wisdom, on our ability to keep all the little planets of our concerns in perfect orbit around the great blasting sun of our inner control freak. Meanwhile, we are white-knuckling it all the way. Nadia Bolz Weber calls this "functional atheism."

Some verbal hallmarks that you are a functional atheist are: "I can handle this all by myself." "Don't worry about me." "Yes, everything's fine."

One of the great sicknesses of the 21st century is our solitariness, our isolation from each other and from God. We are allergic to asking for help and have a pathological fear of being thought "needy." Some of us will walk in our own counsel right off a cliff rather than show our vulnerability to another human being or turn to God in prayer.

Here's a news flash: You're just as God made you, and that includes being needy. Control freaks, perfectionists and fiercely independent types are not of much use to the God who made us to fit together, interlocking parts that hold the whole Creation in place.

Let us pray **we sing the Taize chant, O Lord hear my prayer three times.**

Holy One, we know that you are the rock and anchor of our lives, take away our shame that we really can't handle this all by ourselves, and use our neediness to show the world what your power is really like. Help us to take everything to you in prayer and trust in your goodness and mercy. Amen

When you came in, you were given a piece of newspaper. Take that now and think of any burden or worry you are holding that you want to give to God. Imagine putting it into the paper or write it on the paper and then screw it into a ball. Bring the ball and put it into the basket here – offering it to God and unburdening yourself of that thing – you no longer have to carry it alone. We will also put into the basket concerns from the wider world:

The situation in Sudan  
The plight of refugees and asylum seekers  
The continuing war in Ukraine  
The economic situation in Budiriro and Zimbabwe...

### Hymn Heaven Shall Not Wait

Heaven shall not wait  
for the poor to lose their patience,  
the scorned to smile, the despised to find a friend:  
Jesus is Lord;  
he has championed the unwanted;  
in him injustice confronts its timely end.

Heaven shall not wait  
for the dawn of great ideas,  
thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of pain:  
Jesus is Lord;  
he has married word and action;  
his cross and company make his purpose plain.

Heaven shall not wait  
for the rich to share their fortunes, t  
he proud to fall, the elite to tend the least:  
Jesus is Lord;  
he has shown the master's privilege –  
to kneel and wash servants' feet before they feast.

Heaven shall not wait  
for triumphant Hallelujahs,  
when earth has passed and we reach another shore:  
Jesus is Lord  
in our present imperfection;  
his power and love are for now; and then for  
evermore.

John L. Bell & Graham Maule

### Bible Reading: Acts 2:36-47

Most of the readings set for today relate to Jesus or God being the Good Shepherd, all except this one. These verses are part of the long speech Peter gives after the Holy Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost and some in the crowd thought the disciples were drunk because they were speaking in tongues. We read more verses than were set in the lectionary, including:

'The promise is for you, for your children, and for those who are far away.' As we get slowly, slightly closer to making a decision on what work to do on our building, not only to fix the repairs, but to set an example of sustainability and net-zero carbon use, and to provide a welcoming, open space to the wider community, let us remember that the kingdom of God and the promises of God, are not only for us, for those who have been here a long time and may not be here much longer, but for your children, grandchildren and those who are far away – who do not know about the love of God.

Peter also says, 'save yourself from this corrupt generation.' As Christians we are called to be different, to swim against the tide and not simply go along with societal trends or culture wars. As I was going to swimming on Wednesday, I heard Pause for Thought on Radio 2. Unlike the Radio 4 Thought for the Day which is usually by Anglicans and quite erudite, the Radio 2 version is much more down to earth and aimed perhaps at those who are not religious. It also has a much wider range of faiths and denominations, including from the URC. Wednesday's speaker was Muslim and in reflecting how her life and daily routine had been turned upside down by the month of fasting for Ramadan which recently ended with the Eid celebrations, she quoted the 13<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet Shams Tabrizi who said, "Instead of resisting changes, surrender. Let life be with you, not against you. If you think 'My life will be upside down' don't worry. How do you know down is not better than upside?"

In her Secretary's report to the AGM, Sue said – Life is very different now, and our intentions to try to renovate our premises to make them more welcoming and environmentally friendly are part of trying to move forward. As a Church, we have to recognise change and adapt to it if we still want to be worshipping here in ten or fifteen years' time. It may take us out of our comfort zone, but we have to accept that the way we did things even ten years ago may not be relevant to society today.

The early church went through many changes and difficulties – those from a Jewish background had to change their customs and ways of doing things, uniting with those from a pagan background who had to totally change their worldview and practices. We hear in Acts how they held all things in common – they shared what they had and made sure everyone had enough. They ate their food with glad and generous hearts 'praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.'

We can learn from other cultures and religions. In March I spoke to the Concord ladies about the hanami festival in Japan. Hanami celebrates the transient beauty of flowers with picnics under the cherry blossoms, which are now out here. Sadness is inevitably bound up with the experience of beauty, because nothing lasts for long. Buddhist thought about impermanence together with the Shinto

communion with nature, influence this celebration of natural beauty and recognition that nothing lasts forever. Everything is transient. So as we earlier discarded our worries and gave them to God, please now come and take a petal – reflect on its beauty and on its temporary nature. Let go to accept change.

**Hymn** For the beauty of the earth R&S 41 omit v6

Earlier on, we brought our worries to God – this screwed up paper. While I was on holiday, I went to a small photography exhibition and there was a photo of a homeless man wearing what appeared to be clothes made out of rubbish (pic). The title of this picture was 'Nothing is ever lost, Everything is transformed.' So, we are going to transform our burdens into hope.

I remembered as a child, growing cress on newspaper, so I had a quick look on the internet to see if it worked with shredded paper. Well, things have moved on – they have changed and improved and there are lots of things that can be done with shredded paper (maybe the gardeners among you knew this).

Here are a few things you might like to try at home:

- A homemade seed starter can be made from shredded paper pulp. (pic)
- Insect repellent - To create a wide-spectrum repellent that is effective against all insects, mix equal proportions of peppermint, rosemary, basil, thyme and clove oils (roughly ten drops of each) and spray it on a heap of shredded paper. Keep this arrangement in your flower bed to get rid of creepy, crawly pests. Being a natural resource, paper is easily compostable and does not damage your crops in any way.
- Adding a layer of shredded paper is a great way to retain moisture, particularly for bean and pea plants.
- Shredded paper can be used as mulch. (pic)
- You can use it as stuffing for scarecrows. (pic)
- You can use it to protect seedlings.
- Or you can simply use it as a seed starter. (pic) You use the shredded paper to make paper and while it is still wet sprinkle on some seeds. Once they are dry, plant them in a pot with soil.

I don't have very many, but here are a few hearts of homemade paper, which you moisten and add seeds to. (if you don't have any seeds, talk to Penny as she may have a few wildflower seeds spare) Otherwise, if you would like to, come and collect some shredded paper to use however you want in your garden and remember that God takes our worries and creates hope with them.

I was going to bring some plastic bags for this, but we're an Eco Church and we don't need any more plastic in the world, so there are some paper cones to take your shredded paper – it could get a bit messy, but that's OK – life is messy!

**Prayers of Intercession** (based on Psalm 23)

Gracious God, you care for me; I need nothing more.

Hear the cry of those who are hungry;  
hungry for justice, and dignity, hungry for freedom, and love.

You lead me into a haven of peace and rest.

Hear the cry of those who are alone;  
those who grieve a relationship broken by death or human failing,  
those who live in the isolation of a hospital room, a prison cell,  
a frail body, a confused mind.

You breathe new life into me and lead me in new ways.

God whose breath is life itself,  
we pray for a just and caring use of your creation;  
a fair sharing of its abundance, an ethical searching of its mysteries.

You are with me, and comfort me,  
even when the darkness of the world looms large.

We pray for those who seek the truth;  
those who cannot speak, and those who cannot be heard,  
that the light of your Word  
may shine in the darkness which overshadows their lives.

In the face of those who trouble me  
you provide for me, and pour out your blessings.

Hear the cry of those trampled by racial or religious intolerance,  
disoriented by homelessness, defeated by unemployment;  
God of justice and compassion you are with me always  
and have promised to sustain me all my life.

Enlarge our vision of life, and make us bold in our hope,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let our cry come to you; and with the saints in every age we pray,

### **Lord's Prayer**

We have given up our burdens to God. We have accepted change and that nothing lasts forever. Now we remember that there is one constant in our lives and that is God. No matter what else changes, regardless of whether our plans and aspirations come to fruition, God is with us, walking alongside. After swimming on Wednesday, I had a conversation with one of the other ladies about how calming and meditative movement is, which is partly why you were invited to bring along things to do with your hands today. Swimming, walking, gardening, drawing – these gentle activities are just enough to calm the noise in our busy minds. This is way labyrinths are often used for prayer – the slow walking calms the body and helps bring us into the presence of God. There wasn't space to set up a labyrinth here, but as you now come to collect the final item, perhaps walk back to your seat in a circular route rather than directly and walk slowly. I wanted to give you small crosses or cross stickers but I couldn't find any. So take one of these plain, simple wooden hearts to remind you that you are in God's heart and God is in your heart. "The Lord said, I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God, and they will be my people." (Jeremiah 31:33)

**Hymn** Let us build a House Red folder 54

### **Blessing**

Day by day, God leads us:  
to the deep, deep pools of peace,  
to the green, lush lawns of grace.  
Day by day, Jesus calls us:  
to pour out ourselves in service,  
to anoint the stranger with hope.  
Day by day, the Holy Spirit shows us:  
the community we could be,  
the family we are called to become.

May the God of love hold you, may the Good Shepherd guide you and may the Holy Spirit always accompany you. Amen

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