

Worship for Fleet URC & Beacon Hill URC

Sunday 2nd May 2021

with Holy Communion



Led by Karen Smith

Opening music: God is love, his the care

Welcome & Gathering Prayer

On our walk with you, we rest for a while, listen and worship, for you are the one who guides us, the one who feeds us, the one who blesses us and the one who keeps us safe. On our walk with you, we rest for a while, listen and worship. Amen

Call to worship

In the darkest valley,
at the banquet table;
in the hard work of life,
at the moments of ease;
in our day-to-day reality,
at times set aside—
like this time, now—
for worship, for listening, for paying attention;
with every step we take:
goodness and mercy follow us; our cups overflow. ~ written by
Joanna Harader and posted on Spacious Faith. <https://spaciousfaith.com/>

Prayers of Thanksgiving & Confession

And across our beautiful, evolving world another Easter dawned, only a few weeks ago, tenderly inviting us to ponder upon wider truths and alternate visions.

Truths of both heart and mind that find their roots in the mystery & practicality of God.

Basic truths illumining our often, uncertain, journeys –

Allowing us to reconnect with the energies of Christ:

That life does come from death;

That hate is not the final word;

That the broken continue to sing with joy:

That the trees and the mountains clap their hands;

That forgiveness resides in the heart of the human condition;

That love, with its multiple faces, remains our comparison.

So remember – Christ is risen!

Risen again in the midst of it all –

That in some amazing way we too may be people of hope who walk in the light, imbued with the Spirit.

Adapted from Fire and Bread written by Peter Millar

Words of Assurance

Lord, who lays down your life for your sheep, how can we doubt your forgiveness?

Arms once stretched out upon a cross now close in embrace as we return; enfolded, may we know the fullness of love that lives to forgive, and forgives that we might live. Amen.

[Roots on the Web](#)

Our Father, who art in heaven, read by Maureen Coney
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**

Reading: 1 John 3: 16 – 24 read by Tom Dean

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 19 This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20 If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 24 The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

This is the Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Hymn: Amazing Grace

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

God's grace has taught my heart to fear,
His grace my fears relieved.

How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
God's grace hath brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

And when this heart and flesh shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

--John Newton, 1725-1807

Reading: John 10:11-18 read by Mike Walters

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. **13** The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14** "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— **15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must

bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. **17** The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

This is the Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Reflection:

In the Gospel reading this morning, we are invited to live in a rich, metaphorical world. A world where there are a lots of sheep and one, good, sacrificial Shepherd. It's probably not a world we know anything about since not many of us have first-hand experience living off the land or tending to a flock. But this morning we are invited to live among the grassy slopes and rocky hillsides of first century Israel.

In the past I have done some research on the ins and outs of Old Testament shepherding or how it was done in the first century. But, this morning I thought we might imagine what it's like to be a sheep, spending our time meandering around with the flock, listening for a voice who calls us by name.

What does it mean, then, to be a sheep?

To be a sheep is, at its most basic, to be an animal. I'm guessing they don't spend their days thinking about getting jobs done at home or work, meeting deadlines and how to use Zoom. They have much more fundamental needs, like eating and resting & at this time of year having lambs & seeing those lambs gambling in the fields. Sheep, it seems, are just happy to be sheep: eating & walking & sleeping & bleating their way through life. A sheep is an animal loved by their Creator.

They are safest and happiest as part of a flock. When one does wander off, it knows it is alone and gets scared. Sometimes, a sheep gets lost, it's true. But most sheep know to stick together. If

you've ever watched a flock of sheep, if one reacts to someone walking nearby, they nearly all react in the same way and move away.

Because most sheep are followers - they need someone who knows what is best and can tend them; someone to ward off scary wolves and defend them in the face of danger; someone who will memorize their markings, knowing their distinctive identities; someone who will help bring new lambs into the world; someone who will bury those who have died from illness and age; someone who is trustworthy and someone who knows the lay of the land, the places of danger and the safe places.

And isn't that something that most of us recognise in ourselves? In the last year more than any other time, we have not been the masters of our own destiny. To be a sheep, I say, is remarkably similar to being a human. We need community and will follow if another will recognise what's best, keep us safe and knows us as individuals and we have trust. Quite often we have no idea where we are going in the first place without guidance, protection and advice. Opening up buildings and planning ahead with the spectre of the pandemic lurking in the background is a bit like that! We are in desperate need of a Shepherd.

And this shepherd is a particularly *good* shepherd. One who will lay his life down for you. Yes, for you. This good shepherd may take you on a long and winding journey. And as you follow this shepherd, there may be days where you wonder to yourself: this shepherd seems to be taking us to strange and unfamiliar places. Those pastures back there seemed good enough for us – why, oh why, are we travelling again to somewhere new, doing things in unfamiliar ways – like Zoom for worship?

As government guidelines change and we emerge in to a daily and church life that will be similar to before but different - because surely we've changed and experienced aspects of church in the last year that has elements we have learned from and will influence how we are church post pandemic - we will become aware of those

new pastures the Good Shepherd is leading us to and trust in him. Then perhaps it won't be so scary.

And it's reassuring, as people of faith, his sheep, that the Good Shepherd calls each one of us – can you hear him? He calls out your name, he invites you to get close, to join the flock for the journey and to follow him wherever he leads.

Will you follow? Will you go where he calls? Will you let him love you? Will you trust him, the Good Shepherd, with your very life and that of his church? Through him we know what true love is because he laid down his life for us. And as John's letter that we heard this morning says, he calls us to action and to what pleases him – to have confidence before God. Challenging times lie ahead, but if we listen for his call, accept the invitation to be close to him by doing as God wills then there can be such exciting times in our church lives before us. It might just look & feel a bit different.

Surely, surely, his goodness and unfailing love will pursue us all the days of our lives and we will live in the house of the Lord forever. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

This prayer invites you to pray through Psalm 23 as a prayer of intercession (read by Tom Dean & Mike Walters)

The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.

Dear Lord, you are not just my shepherd but a good shepherd to all in the world.

You give us all and more than we need and can ever want. May this abundance be a reality for many today in our world.

He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

For those who are in desert seasons and living through difficult moments in their life we pray that you might quench their thirst and give them peace that surpasses all understanding.

He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honour to his name.

We pray particularly for all those leaders who feel weak, physically, mentally or spiritually. May you give them wisdom and strength in their time of need so that they each might bring you honour through their actions.

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

We pray for those who live in fear and with an anxious soul. May your Spirit comfort so that they might know of your closeness. In a moment of silence we name someone that we ask you to comfort and protect at this time. *[Pause]*

You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honour me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.

For those facing trials and situations this week that seem impossible. Anoint our lives with your grace and Spirit, and cause my cup to spill over with blessings, for the benefit of others.

Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

We pray that your unfailing love might flow out from this place today so that lives will be transformed. Amen.

Prayers of intercession written by Matthew Forsyth © **Twelvebaskets 2021**

Communion

Hymn: Break thou the bread of life sung by Ruth & Joy Everingham

Break thou the Bread of life
O Lord, to me,
As thou didst break the loaves beside the sea.
Beyond the sacred page I seek thee, Lord;
My spirit longs for thee, O living Word!

Thou art the Bread of life
O Lord, to me,
Thy holy word the truth that saveth me;
Give me to eat and live with thee above;
Teach me to love thy truth, for thou art love.

O send thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me,
That he may touch my eyes, and make me see;
Show me the truth concealed within thy Word,
And in thy book revealed I see the Lord
Mary Artemisia Lathbury & Alexander Groves

Invitation:

Jesus shared meals in all kinds of homes:
The home of Zacchaeus
a collaborator and a crook.
The home of Simon, a Pharisee
where he defended the woman
who caused a scene at the dinner party.
The home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus,
his friends,
a house where he could laugh and relax.
We're used to sharing this meal
in grander buildings, spaces set-apart as sacred.

But this is where it all began:
in ordinary houses.

In upstairs rooms and wayside inns
and around kitchen tables.
In the spaces where people live,
surrounded by the ordinary clutter of living.

Come, living Jesus, be our guest
here in our homes.
Come, living Jesus, be our host
here at your table. **Amen.**

Thanksgiving:

We praise and thank you, Eternal One,
Love that will not be contained.
For you created the earth:
its grandeur, its detail, its delicate balance.
And you created us, women and men,
to tend and protect and delight in it.

And when we forgot our beginnings,
neglected our purpose and lost our way,
you sent prophets to call us back
and laws to illumine our path
and finally came yourself
to show us how to live
and to demonstrate the magnitude
of your love for us.

Love that will not be contained.
Love that will not give up on us.
Love that will journey into the darkest places,
even the grave,
to find us.

The story of the Lord's Supper:

Let's hear again, the story of Jesus' supper with his disciples on
the night before he died, as it's been recorded by the writer of the
Gospel of Matthew:

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread,
and after blessing it he broke it,
gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.'
Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them,
saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of
the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of
sins.

Blessing and sharing of the bread and wine: *And so we pray...*

Come, Holy Spirit, pour out your blessing on our bread and wine
and on us, your gathered people.
We don't need a particular table, a silver chalice or starched table
linen.
It's your presence that makes these ordinary things holy. **Amen.**

Here is bread:
broken, as the body of Christ was broken
broken, as the heart of God was broken
broken, as the seal of the tomb was broken
broken to make us whole.

The body of Christ, broken for us. *[we eat the bread]*

Here is wine:
a cup that brings us together, even in our social distancing
a cup of forgiveness and blessing.

The blood of Christ, poured out for us. *[we drink the wine]*

Prayer after communion: *Please pray with me...*

Thank you for the grace that makes space for us at your table.
Thank you for the familiar and beloved faces on our screens.
Thank you for the closeness we experience through technology,
and through sharing this meal together.
May we continue our lives having been nourished and
strengthened,

filled with your uncontainable love that spills over to bless the
world. **Amen.**
<https://worshipwords.co.uk/lockdown-liturgy-for-communion-cara-heafey-uk> (adapted)

Blessing

May the God who holds us tenderly in the palm of his hand,
comfort us
May the God who feeds us tenderly, direct us.
May the God who loves us tenderly, bless us,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen

Closing music: The King of Love my Shepherd is

Responses led by Maureen Coney

Opening music from <https://www.smallchurchmusic.com/Snippet/S-GodIsLove-Theodoric-PipeLC-48-CAM.mp3>

Closing music from <https://www.smallchurchmusic.com/Snippet/S-TheKingOfLove-PipeL1C-48-CAM.mp3>

Hymns: Break now the bread of Life sung by Ruth & Joy Everingham no permission required

Amazing Grace sung by Ruth & Joy Everingham no permission required

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