

**Bulletin for Sunday 25th April 2021**

Good Morning!

Have you ever bottle-fed a lamb? Surely one of life's treats... unless you happen to be a shepherd, and tired out from lambing and caring for the needs of a whole flock. I feel it's very appropriate that the lectionary brings us Jesus' words about the good shepherd as the lambs are bouncing around in the fields and 'Our Yorkshire Farm' is back on the TV on Tuesday evenings!

Let's pause as we come to worship..... and then praise God as we sing:

Hymn:           Awake, awake to love and work!                   (R&S 608)

Prayer: God of new life,  
we praise you for the morning,  
for the new green shoots, fresh leaves, and blossom,  
for the lambs and baby birds and all the signs of Spring.  
We marvel that despite the size and complexity of your creation  
you care about each of us, your sheep, and know us by name.  
We ask your blessing on everything we do,  
and everything we give in your service,  
today and every day.  
Through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.   Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Reading:           Psalm 23   and   John 10 verses 11 to 18

Reflection:    The shepherd - in both our readings today - is the epitome of caring. The psalmist describes him as a provider of the basic necessities of life, such as food (in the attractive form of green pastures) and fresh water, as any decent shepherd would surely be. But the psalm goes on to describe a relationship between shepherd and sheep which is deeper and closer, involving trust on the part of the sheep, springing from their experience of the shepherd's understanding and support.

Jesus' insistence that the mark of a 'good' shepherd is their willingness to protect their sheep, even by dying in their defence, sounds like the ultimate proof of caring. Yet a shepherd who is killed defending them is no help to the flock, who will then be totally vulnerable. We need to spot that Jesus here refers to his own death, which is not final but followed by resurrection, after which the caring relationship with the sheep, rather than ending, can continue at a deeper and more permanent level. In identifying himself with the tradition of the good shepherd of the psalm, Jesus is offering deep, reliable, loving care. In suggesting that he will die for his flock, he is offering to change our whole conception of life, death, and the infinite love of God!

Hymn: The King of love my Shepherd is (R&S 552)

Prayer: Caring God  
We hold before you this morning  
all who are dependent on the physical care of others.....  
including babies and children, the frail and sick,  
and those who for whatever reason can't manage unaided...  
We also hold before you their carers...  
and those who love and care very much about them...  
We each of us pray for those closest to us,  
and for all the concerns of our hearts...  
Caring God, hear our prayers, spoken or unspoken,  
in the name of the risen Jesus. Amen

Hymn: Lord, speak to me, that I may speak (R&S 613)

Blessing: May we follow the good shepherd faithfully;  
and may the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us and with all those we love  
this week and always. Amen

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As we return to worshipping together, please remember that we need to wear masks; maintain a distance from each other; and not chat, especially indoors. Singing is only possible outdoors, services must be short, and extra ventilation may make it chilly! Crucially, you **must** let your Church Secretary know you want to attend.

In our Billingshurst and Petworth buildings worship is being held indoors.  
In Pulborough it is held outside on the grass. All services start at 10.30am.

There will be no services on Zoom this Sunday (25th), but next week the evening 'Sunday at Six' Zoom will resume.

For all of us there is a chance to chat at the 11.30am 'After Church Coffee' Zooms.

Anne Lewitt