

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever. Amen.*

Today, we pause to give thanks and pray for CrossReach – the social care arm of the Church of Scotland. CrossReach operates over 70 expert services across Scotland covering areas including substance use, homelessness, mental health, and specialist residential care. Our doors are always open for those in need, but we cannot do this without us – the members and friends of the Church of Scotland.

CROSSREACH

Care you can put your faith in

It's been tough recently, the suicide rate in Scotland is at its highest level in almost 10 years with 833 people taking their own lives in 2019 alone. It is not yet known the full extent of Covid-19 has had on that already horrifying number. What is expected, is that the long-term effects of the pandemic will continue to have a direct impact meaning that people all over Scotland will need Crossreach more than ever.

For many of us, the past year has been a real challenge. It has opened our eyes to the struggles of mental health in a way like never before and has shown us all how anyone can experience isolation and loneliness. Now, more than ever CrossReach needs to be there for everyone who goes to them looking for that extra support. In 2020 the number of people in vulnerable positions who needed the help of CrossReach rose substantially. CrossReach has over 70 dedicated services in Scotland and our doors are always open for those in need.

Click on the link below for more details on the work of CrossReach
<https://www.crossreach.org.uk/>

Bible Reading: John 10:11-18 - I am the Good Shepherd. Read by Euan Rowe, Colston Milton Parish Church - <https://youtu.be/BhfsC-rmaGM>

All Age Talk by Matt Sinar – Stonehaven: Fetteresso
<https://youtu.be/V7mTgP6dSXo>

Song: There is a love that seeks us
Judy Gresham, Carey Luce, Geraldine Latty, Jo Doré
https://youtu.be/n80-sj_kPg4

St Nicholas Church, Sighthill
25th April 2021

Opening Hymn: The Lord is My Shepherd

<https://youtu.be/2BdWsPuCPHM>

Call to Worship

God of Peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of an eternal covenant, make us perfect in goodness so that we may do Your will; and create in us what is pleasing to You; through the same Jesus Christ our lord.

Prayer of approach and confession

Leader: Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd, as a shepherd gathers their flock so You have gathered us today drawing us in to the shelter of Your flock to feed and refresh us.

All: Some of us come before You rejoicing, because our path has led us through green pastures and You have filled our cup of happiness to overflowing. Some of us come before You battered and bruised by life, because our path has led us through dark and frightening valleys and we need to know Your strength restoring our souls.

Leader: Some of us, like foolish sheep, come before You ashamed, because we have wandered astray instead of following You and now we come to seek for Your forgiveness. If we have followed the crowd, doing as others did, forgetting that we are pledged to follow You, then, Good Shepherd, set us right.

All: If we have chosen to do what we want rather than act out of love for others and have found ourselves in difficulties, then Good Shepherd set us right. If we have been so preoccupied with other things that we have stopped listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd, then Good Shepherd set us right.

Leader: Bring us back from where we have wandered and set our feet on the path that leads to life. Speak Your word of pardon, Lord and remind us that You said: "I have come to seek and to save that which was lost." May each of us know that we matter to You, however far away we may have strayed. May we hear Your voice afresh during our service today and draw closer to You before we leave. May we entrust the week ahead to You and have the courage to follow You day by day. For we pray this in Your name. Amen

Rt Rev Colin Sinclair, Palmerston Place Church

Brief Reflection

This account of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is one of John's especially memorable moments. Unfortunately, it is often remembered or quoted out of context. This account actually emerges out of a conflict with the religious authorities in the previous chapter (9). John 10 begins in the middle of a quotation that has started at John 9:41. Jesus is continuing a conflict with the religious authorities, following His restoration of the sight of a man born blind. When the authorities cast the man out, Jesus finds him and receives him as His own — His "sheep". The man born blind receives not only physical sight but also spiritual insight, while Jesus tells the powerful opponents that in their insistence that they are able to see, they remain spiritually blind.

He illustrates the conflict of John 9 in John 10 with the contrasting images of the good shepherd and the false shepherds, who do not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climb in by another way. Unlike Jesus, others do not have the best interests of the sheep at heart; they steal, kill, and destroy, while Jesus, who is metaphorically both the door to the sheepfold and the shepherd of the sheep, offers abundant life.

As our passage for this Sunday begins, we learn (and we hear it again and again in these verses) that the goodness of the true shepherd comes at a cost. While the hired hand, who does not care for the sheep because they are not his own, runs away when the wolves come, the shepherd does not. The good shepherd lays down his life. In fact, the phrase 'good shepherd' is repeated five times in these nine verses and is intended to distinguish the good shepherd from the hired hands that run away when danger comes, leaving the sheep in peril.

The only, true and best shepherd is, of course, the Lord of Psalm 23, another recommended text for this Sunday; Jesus' relationship to that great "I am" is evoked here in the form of those beautiful and unforgettable words — I am the good shepherd...

Yes, Jesus is the good Shepherd, and we are his sheep — the flock of His pasture. He knows His own (and loves them, 13:1). And they/we know Him (as in 10:4), as the man born blind, the hero of John 9, comes to know Him and to testify to who He is.

We sheep-folk are told only to cleave to Jesus, to love, and to tell the world that our God is good — all the time. In the closing section of this reading John draws the Father's love into the image. He mirrors the relationship between the Father and Son with that Jesus, the Good shepherd has with His us, His sheep. He defines that relationship as one of love, deep, deep love. John says, in verse 17, that the Son lays down His life, but He will also take it up again. Jesus speak about the love He has, on the one hand, for His Father and, on the other, for the people for whom He came to serve and save. It seems to me that those closing verses of this portion of scripture are intended to point us to the unity of that pure love and mutuality of knowledge between the Father and Son. These verses also invite us, like the Son, to choose to abide in love. As we will hear in the next two weeks, and it is this gift of love that Jesus asks His Father, in John 17 to grant to His sheep. Then there is a suggestion in John 21:15-19 that the sheep within the story, like Peter, and the sheep of the future (we included) might later, in light of the Son's laying down and taking up, function as better and loving hired hands, the ones missing from the imagery of John 10.

(Thank you Meda Stamper for your commentary in Working Preacher on John:11-18 that helped me to put this reflection together)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Eternal God, as Jesus and the early Church cared for those in need, we pray for all who suffer and are not cared for, or whom care cannot reach. We pray for the elderly who die alone, the young who are neglected, or cruelly treated, young and old whose weaknesses are exploited and sensitivities abused. We pray for all who have grown hopeless and weary as each day is like the last.

For those who face hunger and homelessness with no way out; refugees from war and violence to whom no-one wants to give a home. Those whose lives have been wrecked by conflicts they do not understand and cannot affect or change. Hounded by economic and political forces or by the impact of climate change which take no account of their need.

In this world of so much suffering, we pray too for all who are affluent, comfortable, warm and cared for, who do not care. For those who know what they should do but do not bother. For those who close their eyes and minds; and those who simply find other people's troubles and needs a cross they do not wish to bear.

We pray for those who do care — Those who accept the pain and disturbance that knowledge brings, but do not see what they can do. Those whose consciences are hurt, who want to help, but cannot see how. We pray for all who do care — Who are willing to go the extra mile, time and again, often at cost in so many ways. For those who go where trouble, pain and poverty are, risking life and limb, facing danger and fear.

Father, as we pray, increase the depth of love in us and in others who have something to give to the ill, troubled and dying. Give us such love that Your sheep, both inside and outside the fold, may be found, given health, strength, food and the ability to enjoy life to the full and the joy to praise You. We thank You that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and for Your grace and mercy that has made us part of His flock. Thank you that You watch over Your flock

You know us by name, You understand what we are like, You call us to follow and You accompany us along the path, seeking us out when we stray, keeping a loving eye on what we do. Lead us into Your future, on the adventure of faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen

Rt Rev Colin Sinclair, Palmerston Place Church

Closing Song: How Sweet the name of Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUW1DbwIBeg>

Sending

Leader: We will go into the world,

All: abiding in God.

Leader: We will speak of the things of love,

All: abiding in God.

Leader: We will live out the new commandment,

All: abiding in love.

Leader: And trust the God who shapes that love in us,

All: abiding in love.

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