

Prayers of Intercession, Petition and Dedication

O God our Father, we are so privileged to bring our concerns to you in prayer and we are grateful. We pray for your church and give thanks for all those who have made it possible for us to worship you and enjoy fellowship in new ways over the last year. When the pandemic is finally over, may we not go back exactly to where we were before it started. May we rather look at keeping the best of both the old and new ways and recognise that the church is more than just its buildings. We ask for your blessing on congregation members, both those longing to go out into the world again and those who may be fearful of taking the first steps in doing so.

We pray for our country. We bring before you our Royal Family as it continues to adjust following the death of the Duke of Edinburgh and especially for the Queen as she copes with widowhood after such a long marriage. We bring before you all those who are standing as candidates in the forthcoming local elections and ask that those who are elected will remember to work in the interests of all their constituents. We pray, too, for those whose responsibility it is to continue to plan our road back to normal life, that they may do so sensibly and with a sense of balance.

We pray for our families, friends and neighbours. We remember especially those whose lives have been affected by Covid-19, those who've suffered from the disease and those who are unexpectedly mourning the loss of loved ones. We give thanks for all who've worked so hard to keep our health services going during these hard times and pray that they will be able to have some well-earned rest as restrictions ease. We pray, too, for ourselves, as we discern how to do your will better. In Christ's name. **Amen**

Hymn: **In Heavenly Love Abiding**, StF 736, H&P 678

May the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

This worship sheet was created by Ian Warburton, Local Preacher

Darlington District Worship

Sunday 25th April 2021



Call to Worship

Acknowledge that the Lord is God. He made us and we belong to him; we are his people, we are his flock.

(Psalm 100, verse 2, Good News Bible)

Hymn: **Great is thy faithfulness**, StF 51, H&P 66

Prayers of Adoration, Thanksgiving and Confession

Lord, what a privilege to carry everything to you in prayer. We praise and thank you for all the glories of our wonderful world and for the gifts of love and friendship, which sustain us day by day. We give grateful thanks to you for sending your Son Jesus Christ to show us your love and tell us how you want us to live. He suffered, died and was risen and is now with you on high and yet remains with all of us through all time. We pray that we can reflect something of the example that he set to us as we go about our day-to-day lives.

And yet there is sadness in our hearts too, as we recall how we haven't always lived up to these ideals. We haven't loved our neighbours as we might have done and have often remained indifferent to evil in the world. We haven't been as generous with our time or possessions as we might have been. Forgive us, Lord, for letting you down and help us work out where we need to improve. We ask it in Jesu's name. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Bible Reading: [John 10: 11-18](#)

Hymn: **The Lord's My Shepherd (Stuart Townend)**, StF 481

I Am the Good Shepherd

In one of the I AM sayings included in the Gospel of John, Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. So let's look at this description. This has much to do with Jesus laying down his life for his followers. In particular, we see that Jesus is doing this voluntarily, in keeping with some words said elsewhere. There's no sense of compulsion at all.



But why the Good Shepherd? In 2021 this can be a bit of a struggle to understand. The nearest that a good number of us get to sheep is seeing them in the fields, in accordance with that old saying that the more rural parts of our District have more sheep than people, or perhaps having a nice woolly jumper to wear or perhaps eating them in the form of roast lamb. So can an image based on the shepherd and the sheep speak to us today? Yes, I would say so. The shepherd image reminds us that Jesus has both an individual and collective relationship with us. The shepherd knows each of the sheep by name and the flock as a whole, too. The sheep know the voice of the shepherd. The hired hands don't have the same commitment to the welfare of the sheep and may desert them in times of danger but the shepherd will go so far as to lay down his/her life for the sheep. Perhaps this emphasis explains use of the word good. He/she shepherds in the real world, where all sorts of problems exist, and faces up to the world as it is. The good shepherd will be a source of succour and strength even when the world is doing its worst. And he/she knows each of the sheep by name and values each one of them highly enough to die for them. But why the reference to other sheep? Could this be intended to relate to Gentiles and others who are outside the Jewish fold? But let's just clear up one thing that at first sight seems a bit mysterious and that's the reference to those who came before Jesus being described as thieves and robbers to whom the sheep didn't listen. At first sight it may seem that Jesus is disparaging the work of the prophets but it's in fact much more likely that what's being referred

to is the religious leaders of the time, such as the Pharisees and the priests, or perhaps false claimants to the title of Messiah. As early as the book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament, there's a whole host of references to good and bad shepherds in chapter 34 and Jesus may well have had these writings in mind as he spoke.

Do we have people whom we can regard as our shepherds for our own times? Many can look back over family members who would well suit such a description. One of mine from my childhood was my Uncle Joe, the husband of my mum's elder sister, Aunt Net. They were involuntarily childless and Uncle Joe, of course, wasn't my flesh and blood but he couldn't have loved my brother and me more if we'd been his sons. He teased me mercilessly in a light-hearted manner but also gave me all sorts of friendly advice and I think he would have gone to the ends of the earth if it had been in my interests for him to do this. One of my bosses in my early days as a NHS manager also nurtured me in a way that few others did and I developed a good deal in ability and self-confidence in the two years in which he was my superior. Amongst many other things, he was the best delegator for whom I ever worked. Sadly, he died many years ago, without being able to enjoy the retirement which he so richly deserved, but the memory of what he did for me and indeed all who worked for him will stay with me for ever.

In pondering on this, let's bear in mind the pressures on our ministers and others who carry out similar work. Many of them will rightly have a place in our hearts. Let's give thanks for what they do for us as they carry out their ministry. And let's not forget that sometimes we might need to be the shepherd. Even those who deal with pastoral aspects as part of their working life can get burned out from constantly giving and of course they have the same extraneous strains and pressures as the rest of us. May we sometimes be the ones who manage to see what we can do to help and take some of the pressure out of what's troubling them. What a wonderful way of being able to do God's will