**3rd May 2020**

**Call to worship**

Jesus said, **‘***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

***11****“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*.

Jesus says, ‘I am the gate.’
Come, and be loved.
Come, and receive peace.
Come, and find life.



**The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want**;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

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**A gathering prayer**

We come because we know we are welcome, O God.
We come because you call us by name, O God.**.**
We come together to offer you our worship, O God.
**We come in the name of Jesus.**
**Amen.**

We come to you, O God, in penitence for what we have done.
We come to you in anticipation for what you offer to us.
We come to you in hope,
for we know you will give us abundant life.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of confession**

Generous God, you offer us abundant life, yet we ask for more;
you offer us security and sanctuary, yet we seek our own way – despite the risks;
you offer us guidance and direction, and we ignore you and take our own way.
We are sorry for our ingratitude.
We are sorry for our arrogance.
We are sorry that we think we know best.
Forgive us, renew us and restore us to abundant life in you,
in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

For your presence in our lives,
great Shepherd of the sheep:
**we praise and adore you.**

For the security you offer us,
great Shepherd of the sheep:
**we praise and adore you.**

For your life that enriches our life,
great Shepherd of the sheep:
**we praise and adore you.**

For the sense of belonging,
great Shepherd of the sheep:
**we praise and adore you.**

For our place in your sheepfold,
great Shepherd of the sheep:
**we praise and adore you.**
**Amen.**



**Bible Reading: John 10.1-15**

We have to trust a lot at the moment. We have to trust in the scientists to make informed judgement calls on this new disease, we have to trust our Government to make decisions that protect our loved ones and our livelihoods, we have to trust health carers to look after those who are ill. We even have to trust fellow customers in Sainsbury's to stay two metres away from us. For a nation that has celebrated the individual and been sceptical of authority in recent generations, it's a huge leap.

But at the heart of our faith is the call to trust. To place our lives, our futures, our hope in Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The one who not only would, but did, lay down his life so that we might understand the love God has for us and the abundant life he wants us all to live.

In this week's reading (John 10:1-15) we hear how Jesus calls us by our name and we follow because we know his voice. We recognise a truth more ancient and profound and powerful than anything we might hear in this information-laden age.

Jesus said he is the Good Shepherd – and says it to contrast himself to bad shepherds.

There’s a story about an Army sergeant and a private who were doing survival training in the Rocky Mountains. As they made their way through the wood, suddenly they encountered a big angry grizzly bear in the distance that was about to attack them.

Quickly the sergeant sat down, ripped off his heavy hiking boots, took some running shoes out of his backpack, put them on and laced them up in a hurry.

The private stood there watching in disbelief. ‘Excuse me sir’ he said. ‘Do you really think that you’re going to be able to outrun that bear?’

‘Well private’, replied the sergeant ‘I don’t have to outrun the bear. I only have to outrun you!’

The parable of that story and the message in this chapter of John’s gospel is that that the world offers us leaders who don’t really have our best interests at heart but look after themselves first and foremost.

This week several church denominations (including our own) have asked the Chancellor to refuse to financially help out organisations which they claim have avoided paying taxes for years.[[1]](#endnote-1)

They point out the inequality between wealthy business owners and individuals who contribute to the state every year: "We welcome the decisions of the Danish, Polish and French governments to refuse bailouts for corporations registered in tax havens. During this crisis many of the most vulnerable people in our society are paying the price for a health and welfare system woefully unprepared for a pandemic. Meanwhile, some large corporations continue to avoid responsibility, making huge profits yet hiding their wealth in tax havens.

"More than 80 per cent of the British public believe that legal tax avoidance is still morally wrong. This crisis demonstrates why they are right. Today at least $8 trillion sits offshore, with its wealthy owners hiding from their tax and social responsibilities. Developing countries are deprived of up to $400 billion every year by tax dodging."

The clergy ask for the coronavirus pandemic to be a moral turning point in how our economic system works, arguing: "When the pandemic ends we cannot go back to business as usual. If we are to build an economic system that prioritises the wellbeing of people and the planet then a fair tax system where all pay their fair share is essential. This means that wages and working conditions are just and that corporations and wealthy individuals can no longer dodge the taxes they should have paid. We call on our government to foster a fair tax system that serves the common good."

The Chancellor Mr Sunak did not state any plans to ban companies that avoid paying tax from financial support but said: "We are all in this together."

"It is right that during this process people act responsibly, and that is something I have urged all businesses to do."

There have been remarkable stories of businesses that have made sacrificial steps to support their workers. Trying to balance the financial cost of this pandemic with the human cost and not always making the bottom line about profit margins.

The Christian owner of major toy shop chain The Entertainer has said it "has been the most traumatic three months in 39 years" of business but he is trying to prioritise his staff and be fair to the company's stakeholders despite all the financial uncertainty. [[2]](#endnote-2)

Gary Grant started the business in 1981 and runs it with a Christian ethos, allowing staff to spend Sundays with their families, putting Biblical nativity scenes in his shop windows and giving millions to charity.

With all 170 stores closed and no sign of them re-opening any time soon, he like many other businesses are having to make crucial staffing, financial and business decisions because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Just before lockdown The Entertainer made all toys half-price to allow parents to buy toys while schools were closed and to build a buffer of cash in order to pay staff for the next few weeks.

"They're now on full pay to the end of May. It's costing a lot more money than the Government is giving us to give our staff full pay but what I don't want to be doing is, on the one hand, supporting foodbanks and, on the other, sending my staff down the foodbank. That for many of them will be the option - cut in income, can't afford to pay the bills, queue up to get the food at the foodbank - and that's not what I want for my staff."

He said he is well aware of his Christian witness as a business owner, asking himself: "Have we behaved fairly? Do our staff think we've behaved in an honourable, fair way? Are we being fair in the way we are dealing with all of our stakeholders?"

He added that being "fair" in the current circumstances couldn't necessarily mean every party in a business being able to honour their former contracts, but "all supporting each other, not somebody wins and somebody loses," adding that he is hoping to work with all the same landlords, suppliers and third parties again by keeping up good long-term relationships with them.

Speaking about the future, he said browsing and kids running around toy shops could become "a thing of the past" if social distancing is applied long-term, with selling also being slower as people will simply shop for what they need and leave the store as quickly as possible.

When asked what he would appreciate prayer for, he replied: "I want to pray that my staff are well and that their families are well".  He also asked for an agreement to be reached with landlords and for the company to be a good witness to stakeholders.

Daniel Pink[[3]](#endnote-3) a renowned business thinker and author, speaking to Chief Executives in America the other week said, “If you’re a leader, the first line of your obituary may be how you responded to this crisis”.

These are difficult times for businesses and we can only pray for those who lead them that they make wise, just and fair decisions at this challenging time.

Many people know what it is like to work for a boss whose sole allegiance is to him or herself. In other words, if the situation becomes him or you, he’s going to save himself as the sergeant was trying to do in the story of the bear. But what this pandemic is making us realize is that the only way we are going to get through this is by a collective effort – by us looking out for one another.

Never before has the NHS been so treasured, never before has the country relied on Big Government to step in and pay people’s wages and offer guarantees for loans and grants to keep businesses afloat. I hope none of us is going to begrudge paying taxes after this because it is that collective insurance, everybody looking out for each other, rather than each one on their own, which is the big moral, the big learning point, of this crisis.

Hence Jesus makes a distinction here between good and bad shepherds. It’s a text about leadership.

The Good Shepherd is willing to lay down his life for his sheep.

I know of only one sure fire way to determine whether my leader is really in my corner. Is she or he willing to take a bullet that was meant for me? It would be like the sergeant in the story saying ‘private, you run for cover; I’ll stay here and take on the grizzly bear’

If you are in a leadership position you have to earn respect and you earn it by looking after those you lead and, where you can, protecting them and not your own back. Though of course there are plenty in the world who see it differently.

Jesus makes it a test of a true shepherd that they are not just in it for themselves. The issue of sacrifice is a touchstone.

There is a story about a new recruit who went into training hoping to become a marine. He was one of those young men who seemed a bit out of his depth and didn’t quite fit in. He easily became the subject of ridicule for those who enjoy picking on slightly strange people.

In the particular barracks to which this young marine was assigned, there was an extremely high level of meanness. The other young men did everything they could to make a joke of the new recruit and to humiliate him.

One day, someone came up with the bright idea that they could scare the living daylights out of this young marine by dropping a disarmed grenade onto the floor and pretending that it was about to go off. Everyone else knew about this and they were already for a big laugh.

The hand grenade was thrown into the middle of the floor and the warning was yelled. ‘It’s a live grenade, it’s a live grenade! It’s about to explode!’

They fully expected that the young man would get hysterical and perhaps jump out of a window. Instead, the young marine fell on the grenade, hugged it to his stomach, and yelled to the other men in the barracks, ‘run for your lives! Run for your lives! You’ll be killed if you don’t’

The other marines froze in stillness and shame. They realized that the one they had scorned was the one ready to lay down his life for them.

And so, it was with Jesus. The Son of God, who could make the storms cease and blind see, gave himself for us on the cross, so that we may know the love and forgiveness of God towards us.

He is the Good Shepherd. He is someone you can rely on. He has come not for his own benefit, not to look after his own back, but so that we may have life, life in all its fullness, life abundant.

A Christian man who worked in a care home, who was originally from the Philippines and who hadn't seen his family in five years died from coronavirus last friday. [[4]](#endnote-4)

Larni Zuniga, who had studied theology and nursing, came to the UK 12 years ago in a bid to make a better life for his family.

He was a member of Jesus Is Lord Church in Oxford, worked in the Surrey Hills care home in Godalming and received his British citizenship in February.

He died, aged 54, at St Thomas' Hospital in central London, the same place where Prime Minister Boris Johnson was cared for.

Writing a tribute on Facebook, his daughter, Mutya Zuniga-Paulo, wrote: "Lord, I still have lots of questions in mind, but who am I to ask? Help me fix my eyes on you although I have tears in my eyes."

She explained that her mum, Edith, was planning on joining him this June and how all their plans have changed: "Help us Lord to be strong. Lots of dreams not yet fulfilled. But for sure God’s plan will always be the best. I know right now, you are so happy with the presence of God whom we serve."

Friend and Christian, Arnold Barrientos has set up a fund raising page for Larni’s family and said: "*It was 12 years ago when he left his young family in the Philippines to seek for a greener pasture in UK. There were so much uncertainties and he had to endure years of homesickness while working in a care home. True enough, he managed to emerge successful."*

*He was a front liner who I believe deserves to be honored with a decent funeral at least, and for something to help his wife Edith to carry on with life now that Larni cannot send her financial support anymore"*

His wife wrote online: "You fought a good fight of faith, finished the race & kept the faith to our Lord Jesus Christ!!!"

His death reminds us of the sacrifice and cost that many from overseas are making to our people through care workers, health service and things like fruit pickers. They haven’t been appreciated in the past, especially when immigration was a hot political issue. But here they are willing quite literally to lay down their lives in service.

What about you?

If you are in a position of leadership how self-motivated are you? How motivated by a sense of purpose and service are you?

Who inspires you?

And what about Jesus? You may believe Jesus is the Good Shepherd but can you say the Lord is MY shepherd.

It is not enough to believe – you have to make that step of commitment. You can believe Jesus is the Good Shepherd but can you say that Jesus is MY shepherd and I am part of his flock, the sheep of his pasture.

Have you heard the voice of Jesus? The Good Shepherd knows his sheep and they know him.

I have been encouraging people to follow the prayer course online ([www.prayercourse.org](http://www.prayercourse.org) ) and /or read the book ‘How to Pray’ by Pete Greig. There are lots of great ideas for tuning in to God – hearing the voice of our Good Shepherd, having conversation and heart to hearts with the one who loves us deeply.

People: we have a shepherd we can rely on. A shepherd who doesn’t lose his sheep. A shepherd who would lay down his life for his sheep.

The pastoral image of the sheep and the shepherd is very popular in Christian devotion. It can be problematic when this encourages a passivism on the part of the sheep – you and me. Sheep are not the brightest of animals. They have a tendency to follow unquestionably. They don’t have a mind of their own.

Metaphors have their limit. Elsewhere in scripture the relationship between the Church and Christ is more of co-workers in God’s mission, where we have our gifts and our aptitudes to contribute. The emphasis in this passage is on caring nature of the Jesus and his good leadership of his flock.

Joan Kingham was a much loved member and elder of this church. She died at the age of 99 in December 2017. She was a Christian who lived for others. Her first priority was serving her Lord, her Shepherd, and those who Christ cared for. She told me I had to preach on this text at her funeral. John chapter 10, verse 10: *I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness.*

She didn’t want her funeral to be focused solely on the gift of eternal life through Christ, wonderful though that is. The Christian gospel is Good News. But Joan wanted it made clear that following Christ meant the fulness of life now, it should be good news for all in this world not just the next. If we follow Jesus we actively take up his ministry and carry on his work, feeding the hungry, lifting the broken and lowly, reconciling and offering forgiveness, and sharing the love of God with all – now and not just thinking and waiting for heaven.

We don’t have to feel guilty for living an abundant life – we count our blessings for all we have in this country. We shouldn’t feel guilty for that – unless, like in this passage we have gained that life through stealing it from others, being thieves, exploiting others as Jesus puts it.

But I would hope we want to play our part in ensuring others find that abundant life as well, especially that abundant life in Christ - for materialism doesn’t satisfy – for as Jesus said, we can’t live on bread alone – though we need daily bread, a level of material comfort – but we also need spiritual bread – the word of God.

Christian Aid, is an organisation that Joan was very committed to. In Christian Aid week her house was turned into a warehouse of bags –She didn’t expect people to pick up their envelopes – she took them round to their homes. She worked tirelessly for Christian Aid, and for the plight of the poor and hungry.

Joan loved the Christian Aid slogan ‘We believe in life before death’. It summed up what she worked for and longed for. Joan gave her life to help others experience life in all its fulness. I hope you can support Christian Aid at this time of world need.

Jesus said, **‘***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

***11****“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*.

Our own word for good doesn’t quite catch the full meaning of the word John has written here. The word John uses can also mean ‘beautiful’. This doesn’t refer to what Jesus looked like. It’s the sheer attractiveness of what, as a Shepherd, he was doing. When he calls - people want to come. When they realize he has died for them, they want to even more. The point of calling Jesus ‘the Good Shepherd’ is to emphasize the strange, compelling power of his love.

You belong as sheep of his pasture. You are loved – so much that the shepherd will lay down his life for you. It's that simple and it can also be that profound and beautiful.

Lord lead us on the right pathways to green pastures. Bless us, give us peace, comfort, and hope. Help us know that your home is always there for us, with a table prepared and a cup that runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy will follow us all our days.

Amen.

**Prayers of intercession**

Loving God, we pray for those whose lives are empty;
for all who feel alone and unloved;
for those whose lives lack purpose.
Lord of love,
**bring them abundant life.**

We pray for those whose lives are filled with anger and bitterness;
for those who cannot let go of the past,
and so have no present or future.
Lord of love,
**bring them abundant life.**

We pray for those whose lives are filled with anguish and pain;
for those who suffer depression;
for those who are afraid to go out;
for those who cannot see a way forward.
Lord of love,
**bring them abundant life.**

We pray for those who live on the edge;
for those who watch others enjoy life but are unable to join the group;
for those who lack faith;
for those whom others ignore.
Lord of love,
**bring them abundant life.**

We pray for all in authority, those in government, those in business, those leading organisations

In these difficult times we pray they may have wisdom to act fairly and justly, mindful of all the consequences of their decisions

Lord of love

**May their decisions bring abundant life for all**

Loving God, may your abundant life
fill our world, our church and ourselves,
in the name of Jesus.
**Amen.**



**A reflective way into prayer**

*Based on Psalm 23*

*Invite people to sit quietly. Leave a pause after reading each phrase.*
**23 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

Remember and silently offer thanks for all the ways that the Lord provides for you…

**2He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.**

Rejoice in the rest God offers you in his presence…

**3He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

Commit yourself to be guided by God, to trust in his wisdom…

**4Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**

Open yourself to the generosity of God’s love – beyond measure, beyond words, beyond our imagining…

**5Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.**

Praise God that in times of joy and celebration, he is with you…
And in times of sadness, confusion and loss, he is with you…

**6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.**

 For all time, and in whatever we face: the Lord is our shelter, our security, the place where we will find a home.

Let us eat and drink with him now.

Lord come by your Spirit and take this bread and wine. Remind us of Jesus our God Shepherd. The one who loved us, even unto death. The one who wants us to have life in all its fulness and inspires us to work for that fulness of life for others. Come and fill us with his Spirit and unite us once more as sheep of his pasture, members of his church, past present and to come, united through one bread , through the word and through the Spirit.

COMMUNION

Thanks be to God.
**Amen.**

 **A prayer for all ages together**

Praise to God who loves us and gives us life.
**Jesus said: ‘I am the gate.’** *(mime opening a gate)*
Praise to God who comforts us and offers us protection when things go wrong.
**Jesus said: ‘I am the gate.’**
Praise to God who unites us by his Spirit and fills us with his peace.
**Jesus said: ‘I am the gate.’**
O God, give us the courage and wisdom to enter the gate and to know the abundance of the life you offer.
**Amen.**

**The King of love my Shepherd is,**Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
Thy unction, grace bestoweth:
And O what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.



**A sending out prayer**

Go out into the world with the Good Shepherd.
Go where God leads you.
Go that you may serve him.
And wherever you go, know that God is with you.
**Amen.**

1. <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/church-leaders-call-for-govt-not-to-help-companies-in-tax-havens?utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11503118_daily%20news%2030%20April&utm_content=3&dm_i=16DQ,6UJV2,KCOFX7,RGM7T,1> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/christian-businessman-gary-grant-on-leading-2-000-of-his-staff-through-the-most-traumatic-three-months-of-his-career?utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11491245_daily%20news%2024%20April&dm_i=16DQ,6UAP9,KCOFX7,RFB4G,1> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/03/ceos-think-of-coronavirus-response-as-first-line-of-your-obit.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/christian-care-home-worker-who-planned-to-be-reunited-with-filipino-family-dies-in-uk-from-coronavirus?utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11503117_daily%20news%2029%20April&utm_content=4&dm_i=16DQ,6UJV1,KCOFX7,RGM7O,1> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)