

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



30 APRIL 2023

EASTER 4



WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Carve out a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are.

Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

This week's service has been planned by the Wednesday Home Group and Brad Denniston will be preaching the sermon.

WELCOME AND CALL TO WORSHIP

Father God, we gather here today under your care and protection. Thank you for your loving kindness and we pray that you guide our thoughts and actions- as a shepherd caring for his sheep

Strengthen us and fill us with your peace

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all....

Acknowledging Country and Indigenous Peoples

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WORKING GROUP ON WORSHIP

A rock is placed before the people.
Over eons the earth has settled and formed.
The colours merge and the stories entwine.
May those who have kept the stories of God's earth be honoured.

Water is placed before the people.
The flow of life ripples, finding cracks and crevices.
It glistens and sparkles with promise.
May those who quench a spiritual thirst be blessed.

A candle or fire is lit.
Darkness is banished with the sharing of warmth.
Relationships enlighten and corruption dissipates.
May the Light of the World be carried in the hearts of the People of God.

The people stretch out their hands, palms upward.
We reach out to God and to one another.
May God remake us as a Covenant People,
Bound together by the Spirit of this Land and guided by Her First Peoples.

HYMN 145 The King of Love My Shepherd is

PRAYERS of CONFESSION and FORGIVENESS Brenda

Prayer of Confession (Reference -Rev Karen Eller)

When we need proof of you in the world,
you offer your breath.
When we hold too tight to the past,
you offer your grace.
When we cling to old hurts,
you offer your compassion.
When we use our words and actions to
wound others, you offer your healing.
When we fail to forgive those who hold our
past against us you offer your hope.
When we hurt others, with or without
intention, you offer your peace.

When we separate ourselves from you,
you offer your forgiveness,
redeeming Christ; you bring us back to you.
You make possible the impossible.
It is through your love and forgiveness that
we find healing and freedom. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

This is the good news.
Christ forgives our sin,
sets us free to live as God's people and calls
us to live in the light.
Thanks be to God.

SERVICE of THE WORD Karen

Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
³ he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
⁴Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,^[a]
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever

From the New Testament
John 10: 1-18

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

10 “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.^[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ 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. 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.”

HYMN 647 Comfort, comfort all my people

SERMON: “The Lord is my Shepherd” Preacher: Brad Denniston

May the meditation of our hearts and our minds be always acceptable in your sight. God our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

‘The Lord is my shepherd’ - these have been memorable and reassuring words for millions of people across the centuries. Indeed, the author of the psalm speaks of the Lord’s rod and staff being a “comfort”. But today I want to come at this Psalm from a slightly different angle. In conjunction with Jesus’ words in John 10, I want to show that the role of shepherd in the Bible is actually about kingship. Yet Jesus flips what it is to be a king or political leader through his nonviolent self-sacrifice. Far from this apparent surrender being a failure, it is by such means that Christ is victorious over sin and death.

In Psalm 23 ‘Lord’ is the English translation of ‘Yahweh’ - This is the same Yahweh who walks in the Garden of Eden in Genesis and the one who frees Israel from slavery in Egypt. Scripture teaches us through these stories that Yahweh is a God who is with us and for us.

But what did being a *shepherd* mean to the people of Israel? Well, perhaps the most famous shepherd in the Old Testament is David. In Psalm 78 we read ‘*He chose his servant David and took him from the sheepfolds; from tending the nursing ewes he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel, his inheritance.*’ So when David was made king of Israel he didn’t stop being a shepherd, he became a shepherd of people. This often required conquering enemy nations through warfare. The Israelites needed the shepherd to protect them as they walked through the valley of the shadow of death. In Psalm 23 Yahweh the Shepherd is a king.

In John 10, Jesus is the shepherd. He says so. He says “I am the good shepherd”. But here’s a remarkable thing - In the book of Exodus Moses asks God what he should tell the Israelites when they ask him who God is. God answers that he is Yahweh. And what is the literal translation of Yahweh. It is ‘I am who I am’.

Why is that remarkable? Let’s look again at what Jesus says in John 10 - He says “I am the gate”, “I am the good shepherd” . He makes these ‘I am’ statements many times in John’s gospel. I am the Bread of Life. I am the Light of the World. I am the Resurrection and the Life. I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. I am the Vine. This culminates when the soldiers come to execute Jesus. They ask for ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ and Jesus says ‘I am he’. We are then told that ‘When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they stepped back and fell to the ground’. That’s so strange. Why would the soldiers fall to the ground because he said the words “I am he.”? Well falling to the ground was what happened in the Old Testament when people were struck by the presence of God. What we are learning here is that Jesus is the great “I am”. How amazing is that? Jesus is Yahweh in human form. Jesus is the God of Israel made flesh. The *Lord Jesus* is our good shepherd.

But then we learn something else remarkable. In John 10:11 Jesus says “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” What kind of Lord lays down his life? The old kings of Israel fought wars with other nations to guide and protect their flocks. It would’ve been preposterous to the Israelites to think that their lord Yahweh could die. But something very different has happened in the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus fights a cosmic war against sin and death. But his power and authority, remarkably, are expressed in non-violence, love and sacrifice. That is fundamentally different to how the kings and empires of the world achieve their victories. Indeed, when Pilate asks the crowd to release Jesus the crowds reply “If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against Caesar.” To which us Christians reply “Yes. That’s our God. The one who sets himself against caesar.”

So this is the gospel, the good news: Jesus Christ is victorious over sin and death through his own death and resurrection. When the man who becomes God dies and rises from the tomb he leaves death behind and takes us all with him.

But it sure doesn’t feel like we live in a world where Christ is victorious. War and pollution ravage the planet. We get sick and we die. Those we love get sick and die. We find ourselves doing over and over again what we told ourselves we wouldn’t do. We find ourselves avoiding over and over again that which we know we ought to do. Where is the victory?

Well, the victory is in the promise that none of these things - none of them - is the end of the matter. For in Christ’s resurrection we need no longer fear death or sin or anything else that once separated us from God. He is the shepherd who dies and rises victorious to rescue his sheep from death. Think of the opening refrain from that rousing hymn ‘Thine be the glory’:

‘Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory thou o’er death hast won’.

I want to leave you with the hope expressed in the book of Revelation, the final book of the bible. An elder of the church describes a vision for what awaits those who have been martyred for their faith in Christ. The martyrs were members of the early church who were persecuted and died for

following Jesus rather than meeting violence with violence. We may never need to pay for our beliefs with our lives but we may find following Christ entails sacrifice and perhaps even rejection by those who, for good reasons and bad, despise the church. These martyrs walked through the valley of the shadow of death with confidence - confidence to the point of laying down their lives like their good shepherd - in Christ's victory over death. As I read this I want you to notice the echoes of Psalm 23 and Jesus as the good shepherd. Revelation tells us that

“For this reason they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

That's a vision of heaven on earth that, if we have faith, we can see on the horizon. We can now say that though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, for Lord Jesus, our shepherd, is with us.

Amen.

HYMN 534 Love is his word, love is his way

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Warwick

Let us pray.

Good Shepherd,
teach us to follow you to care for all that are close to us,
to protect those who are threatened,
to welcome, those who are rejected,
to forgive, those who are burdened by guilt,
to heal those who are broken and sick,
to share with those who have little, or nothing,
to take the time to really know one another
and love as you have loved us.

We pray for the taming of the wolves of terrorism and war on the face of this earth; we remember especially the people of Ukraine & Russia, Sudan and Palestine and the hardship & suffering they bear. May peace become a reality in all these places in our time.

Good Shepherd, hear us.

Good Shepherd, save and heal us.

We pray for the end of injustice, neglect, discrimination, and the apathy of those who look on yet do nothing. We pray that The Voice referendum may be successful and for the many charities who seek to provide homes, food and support for many who struggle to make ends meet.

We pray for people who have been misled and misused by false shepherds, or exploited spiritually and materially through scams of all kinds, including those online and those that enslave children and adults in demeaning forms of addiction.

Good Shepherd, hear us.

Good Shepherd, save and heal us.

We pray for the removal of the hurts, resentments, misunderstandings; for the rescue of those who once had faith in God but have fallen into empty cynicism. For congregations that struggle to live out the gospel and feel disheartened and overwhelmed and who lack vision and a way forward. May your light, hope and new life bring enlarged faith.

We pray for the blessing of all who are good shepherds to their fellows; who foster hope through the work of medicine, counselling, social planning/support, legal aid, wise laws, volunteering and random acts of kindness. May they know the joy of giving to others wellbeing and the satisfaction of love well done.

Good Shepherd, hear us.

Good Shepherd, save and heal us.

We pray for special care of the dying and the grieving; that they may know in a first-hand way the comfort of the Shepherd whose love does not end at the valley of the shadow of death... we especially ask your peace, presence and comfort be with friends and family of Marg Ponsford and Pat Janson. We pray for your healing touch on David Ward, that he may know your loving presence and peace as he faces an uncertain future.

Good Shepherd, hear us.

Good Shepherd, save and heal us.

Good Shepherd,
Teach us to follow you
and be faithful to the calling you gave us
to be shepherds in your name. **Amen.**

HYMN 380 Yours be the glory, risen, conquering Son

BENEDICTION Neville

The Good Shepherd leads us forward from this place into the world to serve God's people, to witness to God's love in all that we do.

Go in peace and God's peace will go with you.

RECESSIONAL HYMN 10 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want (Verses 1,2 and 5)

Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

Music and Words reproduced with permission under CCLI licenses

Presider: Wednesday Home Group & Brad Denniston

Music: Karen Roberts

Church Office

Tuesdays, 9.30am-1.30pm

Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm

Phone: 0411 958 127

office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

Website: www.ormondunitingchurch.org

NEWS & NOTICES