

## Worship at home

August 8, 2021

*Thanks to Judy Armstrong and Marilyn Shaw for providing music for this week*



<https://www.seetheholyland.net/shepherds-field/> Shepherd and sheep near Bethlehem (© Custodia Terrae Sanctae)

### **God calls us to worship:**

I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord;  
    I will remember your wonders of old.  
I will meditate on all your work,  
    and muse on your mighty deeds....  
When the waters saw you, O God,  
    when the waters saw you, they were afraid;  
    the very deep trembled....  
Your way was through the sea,  
    your path, through the mighty waters;  
    yet your footprints were unseen.  
You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Let us worship God.

### **We bring our praise and confessions:**

Almighty and Living God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;  
you are the source of all good things.  
In Christ you give us the Bread of Life.  
and we know your care for us is beyond measure.  
Through the Holy Spirit, you are present in all situations, both large and small,  
yet your majesty is infinite.  
Your love reaches wider than the expanding universe,  
and your kindness embraces even the tiny sparrow.  
And so we gather in worship to offer you our praise,

our love and loyalty.

Yet, we confess that all too often  
we reject you and your ways.  
We insist on following our own path in our own strength.  
We fail to discern your voice  
and follow instead the voice that tells us what we want to hear.

Forgive us for what we have been,  
amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be,  
so that we might walk in your holy name  
and truly reflect your light  
into our daily realities.

**God assures us of his forgiveness:**

In Christ, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. God has made peace with us through the Cross of Jesus Christ. In Christ, all things hold together. Accept the peace of Christ and make peace with one another in his name.<sup>1</sup>

**In response to the gospel,  
we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources:**

*Please remember to prayerfully make your offerings to the congregation of which you are most associated. If you're a member/adherent of Knox-Moore or St. Andrew's, Mooretown, please send your offering to Howard McKellar or Judy Armstrong.*

**Hymn:** #346 (verse 1, 2) "Jesus the Christ said, I am the bread"

**God speaks to us through his Word:**

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

## The Good Shepherd

*God of wisdom, you have taught us that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from you. Send us your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to receive your Word, speaking through the scriptures. Strengthen us to live that Word as our daily bread. Amen.*

READ JOHN 10:1-19

Very few of us, in fact, no one who is listening to this, lives in a complete vacuum. We are all influenced by many people, ideas, and voices. It starts when we are still in the womb and continues throughout our years.

As we mature, we learn that we can choose which voices are worthy of our attention, our admiration, and our obedience.

In what we've just read, Jesus has compared several voices.

- a) First, there's the bandit.
- doesn't know the sheep
  - doesn't care to learn the sheep's names
  - doesn't take an interest in their well-being
  - uses them only for his/her personal gain

The bandit can be a voice that is external to us, or it can be our own processes of thought. The bandit is the influencer who convinces us that we are not worthy of respect, or joy, or love. The bandit is the voice within us that takes offence. It is the voice that propagates a sense of self-rejection.

The bandit is the voice that robs us of the life God intends for us. That steals and kills and destroys.

- b) Second, is the hired hand.
- trustworthy individual
  - follow proper protocol
  - feed and shelter the sheep
  - do their job

That is, until their job gets difficult. Until looking out for the best interests of the sheep means facing opposition. Until it means possibly risking their own security. Then, they conclude that, given they have no personal investment in the flock, the pay is not worth the risk, so they leave to find work elsewhere.

The hired hand is the voice that takes the safe route. Even if it means compromising the faith. Compromising the gospel.

In this scenario, the wolf represents teaching that is not consistent with the person and work of Jesus; teaching that is not consistent with the gospel; with the Word of God.

The hired hands are those influences, those voices that flee under the threat of opposing views, and leave the community scattered, confused, and scared.

This was the situation for Israel leading into the exile. Shepherds are metaphors throughout scripture for kings and, more generally, those charged with leading the people of God. We read in Ezekiel 34:

*Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, you shepherds of Israel ... You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost... So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and scattered, they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with no one to search or seek for them.<sup>2</sup>*

- c) Which brings us to the third voice for comparison. That of the shepherds.
- own sheep or, at the least, they have vested interest in the sheep's well-being
  - responsible for the sheep

However, by nature of their wealth and their prestige, they succumb to the all-too-common enemies of God's eternal life: pride, lust, greed.

Remember, literal shepherds did not necessarily enjoy wealth and prestige; however, metaphorical shepherds that is, kings and community leaders did. And, again from Ezekiel 34, we read of the Lord God's indictment against the shepherds of Israel:

*Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 34:4-6

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 34:1-3

d) The final voice for comparison is the voice of the *Good* Shepherd.

Notice that Jesus did not refer to himself as simply *the* shepherd, but the *good* shepherd. In this usage “good” refers to something that is intrinsically morally and ethically beautiful and worthy of admiration.

I’m sure we can all think of farmers we’ve known who are above the ordinary.

- outbuildings are always well-kept
- lawns are mowed
- manure is regularly removed, stored, stirred
- change the oil regularly in all equipment
- grease *all* of the nipples on *all* their equipment
- animals are named and loved
- for whom farming is a divine calling

These individuals are not merely farmers, they’re *good* farmers.

Compared with the bandit, the hired hand, and even the other shepherds, Jesus is the *good* shepherd.

Not only does Jesus know the sheep, they know him.

Not only does he feed and shelter the sheep,

he does so *abundantly*.

Not only does he face the wolf,

he lays down his own life for the sake of the sheep.

Jesus’ voice is the voice of the **Good** Shepherd.

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*His is the voice that leads us on the way to abundant life in fellowship with the Father in this age as well as in the age that’s yet to come.*

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Just as disciples need to accept that Jesus is the trustworthy and good way to the promised land of life in fellowship with the Father;

and,

just as disciples need to *see* the light in order to follow it through the wilderness;

and,

just as disciples need to *eat* the bread and *drink* the water of life in order to be nourished by it;

so too,

we need to *hear* the voice of the Good Shepherd in order to fall within his provision and protection.

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*Hearing involves both recognizing his voice from among others, and responding to it.*

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A good first step in learning to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd is to measure the effects of the voices we're following.

Jesus calls us by name and the result is abundant life that reveals the truth of the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We've come across this before. John uses the terms 'abundant life' and 'eternal life' to describe the life God intends for God's creation. Life in its full glory.

Abundant life is nothing short of Christ's own life given for us. It is nothing less than the joy of Christ made complete in us. And, joy, is nothing more and nothing less than the complete relief of knowing that we are loved. That we are valued. That Christ protects us from all that threatens God's plan. The joy of Christ made complete in us is the assurance that we matter – not for what we can bring to the shepherds, but solely because God creates out of love and thus imbues us with value in His eyes.

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*The voice of the Good Shepherd is the one that calls us by name, calls us Beloved, and produces in us a sense of joy that is not limited by our present circumstances.*

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I want to challenge you this week to commit a few verses to memory. I've written them on your lyrics sheet and they were in the announcements I sent out on Thursday. Commit them to memory.

Then, as you go about your daily activities, pay attention to your thoughts, your speech, your tone of voice, your body language, and your actions and consider whether

you are responding in that situation to the voice of the Good Shepherd, or some other. Then, use this observation to help you discern the voice of Christ in your next interaction.

For the good of the nation, the health of our souls, and the glory of God. Amen.

**Hymn #485** “Saviour like a shepherd lead us”

**We respond with prayer, faith, and service:**

God of all generations,  
We look back over the past few months,  
and we are grateful for your steadfast presence with us  
through uncertainty and upheaval.  
We have witnessed tragedy and courage;  
generosity and selfishness,  
resentment and resilience,  
fear and faithfulness.  
We ask that you show us the lessons of this pandemic  
and make us wiser people.

God of church and community,  
We look back over the past few months,  
and we are grateful for your inspiration and support  
through transition and times of testing.  
We have witnessed isolation and new ways to connect,  
old traditions set aside and new opportunities emerging.  
We have seen decisions and dissent,  
noticed people drifting away and others reconnecting,  
called on the skills of many generations to maintain our life together.  
Show us the lessons of this pandemic and make us more faithful people.

God of nations and neighbours,  
We look back over the past few months,  
and we are grateful to you for cooperation and creativity in our leaders  
in politics, education, health care,  
in business, labour and community life.  
We have witnessed both energy and indifference,  
selfless dedication and harsh criticism,  
deep differences and important collaboration.  
We know some neighbours and nations have lost much  
and need help to re-establish well-being.  
We know some have felt deep anger within  
and others have had that anger targeted at them.  
Show us the lessons of this pandemic and make us more engaged citizens.

God of family and friends,  
We look back over the past few months,  
and we are grateful to you for sustaining relationships.  
those nearby and those supported by computer and phone call.  
We have witnessed both loneliness and loving kindness,  
arguments and appreciation.  
We know some families have been torn apart by distance or dispute  
and others have renewed their life together.  
Show us the lessons of this pandemic  
and make us better able to honour our important relationships.



God of healing and hope,  
We look back over the last few months  
and know many are still suffering in body, mind and spirit;  
many are grieving  
and others do not know what the future holds for them.  
Hear us in this holy silence  
as we name in our hearts those people and situations that concern us deeply.

*(Keep silence for 20–30 seconds.)*

Remembering all you have done for us, with us and through us, O God,  
we pray the words that Jesus taught:

**The Lord's Prayer**

**God sends us with His blessing:**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Amen.