

COMFORT in North Carrick

Caring Observant Mindful Friendly Obliging Responsible Tactful

Providing comfort to the people of North Carrick at a time of crisis

Sunday 3rd May 2020

From Rev Gerald Jones

The fourth Sunday of the Easter season is commonly called Good Shepherd Sunday, taking its name from the Gospel reading for the day (St. John 10: 1-16).

One of the loveliest images in the Bible is the picture of God as a 'shepherd'. It is estimated that shepherds are mentioned about 100 times in Scripture, and in Psalm 23, this imagery finds powerful, poetic and popular expression. 'The Lord is my shepherd' is arguably the best known and most loved of all the Psalms, with its strong pastoral overtones.



In St. John's Gospel (10: 11), Jesus makes the bold claim that he is the 'good shepherd'. In the original Greek, this word 'good' (kalos) can mean much more than moral goodness or spiritual authority. The word can also imply a certain outward attractiveness. When Jesus claims to be the 'good' shepherd, he is not only efficient and effectual: he has a certain charm or charisma that compels people to follow him. This picture of Jesus as the 'good' shepherd is similar to the way in which we would describe a 'good' doctor, a 'good' dentist or a 'good' teacher - someone not only highly competent, but outwardly attractive and inspiring.

If we accept Jesus as the 'good' shepherd, then we are his flock—the people of his pasture. If we are to be 'good' in the sense that Jesus is 'good', there must be a certain attractiveness, a certain charisma about us. Indeed, there is no poorer advertisement for the Christian faith than an 'unattractive disciple' - someone depressing and outwardly uninspiring.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said, in reference to the village headmaster at Lamington in Lanarkshire, who was also a lay preacher in the local kirk, that his heart was as hard as flint, and his character as cold as a winter's day. Not a flattering description of a sheep in the flock of Jesus Christ!

On the Fourth Sunday of Easter - Good Shepherd Sunday (if you prefer) - may God grant us grace to be 'good' sheep: to be outwardly attractive, as well as inwardly noble and sincere, so that we may reflect the very nature of Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, who laid down his life for his flock - and rose again that they might live eternally with him and in him.

'The Lord is my shepherd'

From Lynne Rankin, session clerk at Maybole Parish Church

Prayers by Rev Tina Kemp (slightly adapted)



Prayer of approach and confession

Lord God, You are our Saviour and king, our Master and friend, our Shepherd and guide. Wherever we go, You are with us. Wherever we stray, You seek us out. Whenever we call, You hear us.

You are our promise and our hope, our place of rest and peace, our security and our sureness. Whoever we are, You accept us. Whatever we do, You love us. Whenever we fall, You lift us up.

Lord God we come to You at this time from different places, different lives, different situations, with different concerns and different dreams. Yet we come as one, a people of shared faith in a God who shared all.

And so we praise You, Lord God, that You have risen from the dead to fulfil Your promise to all creation; we praise You that you have gifted us Your spirit as a companion and guide. We praise You that you have chosen us as Your people to build Your kingdom here on earth.

Gracious God, our path in life does not always lead us into quiet, calm places of caring and compassion for others. Our journey often takes us off the beaten track and into the difficult terrain of selfishness and anger. Our progress is often slowed by fear and anxiety. Yet You remain at our side, Lord, to comfort and provide, reminding us of Your promise that all is forgiven for all time.

And so we praise You, Lord, that you bless us anew each day with Your grace and goodness. That You open doors to fresh opportunities and that You lead us by the hand to a place we can call home.

May we be refreshed in our journey with You and with one another, that we might love You more and follow You more closely. In Jesus' name. Amen

Blessing - You are sought, seek peace. You are loved, love justice. You are protected, protect the weak. You are safe, save the lost. You are chosen, choose life.

God's loving care



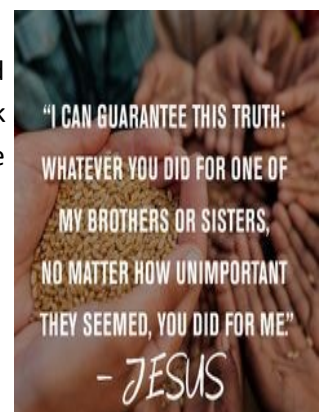
Good Shepherd Sunday is very special for me this year, reminding me, just when I need it, of God's loving care, watching over us and protecting us. Sometimes we can be overwhelmed by life's difficulties and we momentarily lose any sense of God's presence. Yet God's ways of reaching out to us can be so simple, so often manifested in our everyday 24/7 experiences, that, unless we are careful, we miss seeing him.

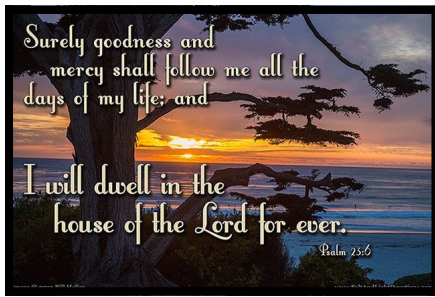
In and around Maybole just now, there are lots of new lambs in the fields, getting used to the new life around them. In our own helplessness at times, we are like those little lambs, and watching them last week made me more aware than ever that we too are being watched and cared for. Sometimes, through a special memory, a smile from a stranger, an unexpected kindness from a neighbour or just standing and staring around us, we sense intuitively that God is close.

In these difficult times of isolation and restrictions for all of us, of bereavement and sorrow for many of us, God's eyes are ever watchful. If we pause for a moment and look around our little community in North Carrick, we see that God is very much in evidence in our families, friends and neighbours.

Ellen Hawkes

Life as we know it may be changing but we do not walk alone.





Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. Psalm 23 v 26

The Easter season is a time of joy and hope when we are filled with the love of the Risen Lord and the courage of the Holy Spirit.

The readings and the Psalm speak of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who holds us close to Him, feeding us and sheltering us.

We are also reading the Acts of the Apostles, hearing about the beginnings of the Church, how the followers of Christ sought to model their lives on the teachings of Christ. Those early Christians sought to live a life totally different from the lives they had lived before.

We hear of a community built on equality, compassion and care, all things were held in common, the vulnerable were supported and all had a voice. They were filled with the joy of knowing the Risen Lord, carried His peace in their hearts and, filled with the Holy Spirit, sought to share the love and compassion of Christ with all.

It wasn't easy, they were reviled and persecuted, the world they knew had been upended but they walked with Christ and felt His love and care.

In many senses our world has been upended, there is uncertainty and fear and a longing for the familiar, all seems changed even our church life. But, alongside this unfamiliar change there has been much change for good, we have recaptured our sense of community, things that once were seen as important to us as individuals have given way to a realisation of how much we need each other, how important our friends and family are.

Instead of looking inward we are looking outward seeking the vulnerable, those in need whether spiritually, mentally or physically.

In many ways this time has made us better people, thinking less of ourselves and more of the needs of others. One year ago would we have seen much of the early church in our lives, possibly not, but today I think we are more in touch with our roots, what it means to be church. My prayer is, that when we have come through these times, we continue to hold those in need in front of us and to build on the wonderful community support networks that have grown up in this time of need.

People talk of 'returning' to normal, as the people of God in this place we must follow the example of the early Church, not looking back but constantly moving forward under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and filled with the love of God.

May Almighty God bless you and keep you safe.

Fr Jim, St Oswald's

All shall be well

As lockdown continues and we adjust to a new way of living, the Church will soon be remembering someone who was no stranger to living in isolation. On 8th May, Julian of Norwich (1342 – c.1416) is commemorated, as it was on this day at the age of thirty and thought to be dying, she experienced a series of visions revealing the love of God. Julian recovered and the visions had such an effect on her that she felt she had to write about them for others to read - 'Revelations of Divine Love'.

Julian was an anchoress and lived a religious life of prayer, confined to one room attached to a church, with only three windows: one for a maid to pass in food and water and take away waste; one looking into the church so she could take part in the celebration of the Eucharist; and one that looked outside.

The writings of Julian are so remarkable because they are the earliest surviving that are written in English by a woman and because of the way in which she describes her experience of God. Her account is of a God of compassion and unconditional love who comforts her in her time of trial and results in her most famous words: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." Words so encouraging to us, for they are not an empty platitude, but come from the experience of someone who suffered and encountered the love of God.

You can learn more about Julian in the documentary, 'The Search for the Lost Manuscript: Julian of Norwich', available on BBC iPlayer.

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From Rev Dr John Lochrie, Locum minister at Crosshill and Maybole Parish Church



St Mark begins his Gospel with the appearance of John the Baptist with his message of baptism and repentance. As he recounts it, the first appearance of Jesus is when he comes from Galilee to be baptised. When he comes up out of the water Jesus is acknowledged by God, but then everything changes. Immediately, the Spirit drives him out into the wilderness. Suddenly for Jesus what has been the normal in his life is taken from him.

Now he will no longer work at the carpenter's bench. His hand will no longer hold the tools to shape the wood, but will find new ways of working. That, in fact, is the reason he spends the forty days in the wilderness. There, through prayer and meditation, he maps out the way ahead for his ministry.

The thing about a true wilderness is that it is trackless and often bare and barren, making finding the way through it far from simple. The way things are, we are living in a virtual wilderness, a place where nothing is familiar, nothing is as it was. We are in a time of uncertainty, perhaps for many a time of darkness when it is difficult to see the way ahead. The self-isolation urged upon us may well help to curb the spread of the virus, but it does separate us from friends and family and loneliness is something of a curse. Somehow we have to find a way through this wilderness. There has to be a way we can get back together with each other and with God. What we are going through shows that we do need one another; that no one is an island entire of himself, as the English poet John Donne wrote. What we are going through ought to help us appreciate the importance of fellowship, love and kindness, and worship.

For many, social media has been a way of keeping in touch. However valuable though things like Facebook might be, we must never forget those who are unable or cannot access the internet. Often they are the ones most vulnerable due to age or rural isolation. We all need to look out for them and thankfully this is happening. Phone calls are being made; shopping and necessary medicines are being delivered. Ways through the wilderness are being found.

The rainbow symbol that has been adopted as a sign of support for our NHS staff is very apt. When God brought Noah through the flood he gave the rainbow as a sign of hope. It remains the sign of God's promise that he will always be with his people.

In that great chapter in his letter to The Romans Paul spells out just what this really means:-

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God.

"What shall we say to these things?

"If God be for us, who can be against us?

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ, shall tribulation or distress or peril?

"No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:28ff.)



In a time of crisis, everyone pulls together. With all churches closed until further notice, local church members have come together to produce this newsletter. None will be distributed by hand but will be passed on electronically. If you know someone who may be interested in reading it, please send it on. The hope is that that some COMFORT is available. God bless.