

Parish of Central Exeter

Fourth Sunday of Easter

8 May 2022

Good shepherds and good clothes

Welcome everyone.



*Our reflections this morning have been provided by Sheila and the Intercessions by Caroline
Many thanks to you both.*

The psalm appointed for today is Psalm 23.

Call to Worship

Awaken from your slumber,
and bring your fears and anxieties
into the presence of the Lord our God.
Hear the call of our Shepherd,
and allow His voice
to lead from selfish ambition
to the feast of grace.
May the light of Christ
shine into the hidden darkness of our lives
and restore us
for the service of the Lord.

Come let us worship God.

*(written by Rev MaryAnn Rennie, and posted on the Church of Scotland's Starters for
Sunday website)*

Gathering Hymn

'This Glorious Eastertide'
This is sung here by the Akua Akhere memorial youth choir. This is a non-denominational
choir based in Tema, Ghana.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACUdLm3QB-A>

Words are below

This Joyful Eastertide away with sin and sorrow!
My Love, the Crucified, has sprung to life this morrow:
Had Christ, that once was slain, ne'er burst His three-day prison,
Our faith had been in vain;
but now is Christ arisen, arisen, arisen; arisen!

My flesh in hope shall rest and for a season slumber
till trumpets east to west shall wake the dead in number.
Had Christ, that once was slain, ne'er burst His three-day prison,
Our faith had been in vain; but now is Christ arisen, arisen, arisen; arisen!

Death's flood hath lost its chill since Jesus crossed the river.
Lover of souls, from ill my passing soul deliver.
Had Christ, that once was slain, ne'er burst His three-day prison,
Our faith had been in vain;
but now is Christ arisen, arisen, arisen; arisen!

Confession

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
The problem is Lord, that I do want – I want all sorts of things, many entirely valid and reasonable – but not all.

He makes me lie down in green pastures
But the grass often looks greener somewhere else.

He leads me beside still waters
But this water is boring – are there not more exciting drinks?

Even though I walk in the darkest valley, I shall fear no evil.
But I do fear, Lord, there are lots of things that make me fearful for the future, not least all the events happening in the world right now.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me.
I really hope so, Lord, but forgive me when I find it hard to see it happening.

I really want you to be my shepherd Lord,
But I'm afraid I'm not the most obedient of your sheep.

But despite this, you do care, and I know that you do. Thank you.

The collect for today

Risen Christ,
faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep:
teach us to hear your voice
and to follow your command,
that all your people may be gathered into one flock,
to the glory of God the Father.

Prayer: Urban Shepherd

(based on Psalm 23)

urban shepherd
you lead us through skyscraper canyons
past carbon monoxide
and mirror glass
and busker
you make us to lie down on park benches
and rest beside sewage settlement ponds
you keep our feet on pavement and escalator and lift shaft
and guide us through the back alleys
of our city

though we enter the concrete crevasse
we will not fear the chaos
for you are with us
you grant us a site in the sun
at a sidewalk cafe
where we drink cappuccino and are glad
you give us doughnut stalls
and film festivals and neon signs

surely your goodness and poverty
will follow us all the days of our lives
and we will come at last to the holy city

(written by Mike Riddell, and posted on Jonny Baker Worship Tricks.)

Reading Acts 9:32-43

³² Peter travelled everywhere, and on one occasion he went to visit God's people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he met a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had not been able to get out of bed for eight years. ³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ makes you well. Get up and make your bed." At once Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All the people living in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

³⁶ In Joppa there was a woman named Tabitha, who was a believer. (Her name in Greek is Dorcas, meaning “a deer.”) She spent all her time doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ At that time she got sick and died. Her body was washed and laid in a room upstairs. ³⁸ Joppa was not very far from Lydda, and when the believers in Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him with the message, “Please hurry and come to us.” ³⁹ So Peter got ready and went with them. When he arrived, he was taken to the room upstairs, where all the widows crowded around him, crying and showing him all the shirts and coats that Dorcas had made while she was alive.

⁴⁰ Peter put them all out of the room, and knelt down and prayed; then he turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up!” She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹ Peter reached over and helped her get up. Then he called all the believers, including the widows, and presented her alive to them. ⁴² The news about this spread all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed on in Joppa for many days with a tanner of leather named Simon.

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Prayer

Lord God,
When you heard Peter say to the body,
'Tabitha, get up'
were you delighted with his faith?
With his belief that in Christ
death is actually overcome?

Do you will us to believe yet?
To believe that almost one billion people can
hunger no more,
thirst no more
and every tear can be wiped away from their eyes?

Help us to hear the call to life,
to get up and serve as Tabitha
'devoted to good works and acts of charity'
and to live in resurrection hope,
that is both now and then. **Amen.**

(originally posted on the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website.)

Reading: John 10:22-30

²² At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' ²⁵ Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; ²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.' ³⁰ The Father and I are one.'

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Reflection

In Acts 9 Luke turns from describing the conversion of Saul to focus on the ministry of Peter. It is a time of peace and Peter is travelling around the region. Luke chooses two miracle stories to record where Peter is shown copying the action of Jesus. First with Aeneas, a paralyzed man, where Peter uses words like those Jesus said to the man lowered through the roof. Then with the resuscitation of Tabitha, if Peter spoke in Aramaic to her, he only changed one letter from the words Jesus spoke to Jairus's daughter. Peter is following Jesus precisely. He acts in the power of Jesus by declaring to Aeneas 'Jesus Christ makes you well' and by praying before speaking to Tabitha. The result of these two miracles was that many people 'believed in the Lord'.

Luke concludes this section with Peter staying with a tanner named Simon. Working with leather was an unclean profession for an observant Jew so here Peter is already showing that he is moving away from strict Judaism. Luke is showing Peter following the instruction given by Jesus to the disciples before the Ascension where Jesus said, 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1:8) He is setting the scene for the next big movement outwards as Peter receives a vision and travels to meet Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who himself has had a vision and who receives the Holy Spirit. Here we have the first Gentile believers.

However, I want to return to Tabitha or Dorcas who is praised for her charitable acts. 'She spent all her time doing good and helping the poor'. It seems that she was a seamstress, making clothes for the community. The CMS Prayerlines for 19 April featured Maria Skoyles who is a student on the CMS Pioneer course and CEO of the Dorcas Dress Project. The prayer was for garment factory workers in Leicester for whom Maria had organised English lessons so that they could communicate with each other. I went onto a website to find out more about her and the Dorcas Dress Project.

In March 2016, Maria Skoyles was prompted to design a dress that would empower the voiceless in the fashion supply chain. This patented design has been developed so it can be produced, locally in the UK but especially in remote parts of the world. It is one size yet fits everyone, even pregnant and breastfeeding mums.

As the founder of the project and with 25 years of experience in the fashion industry (on the factory floor, in the design studio and as a fashion lecturer) Maria's heart cried at the destruction the industry had created. She developed this dress to protect craftsmanship and lift people out of poverty and hardship. The clever cut, pleats and carefully situated ties on the dress eliminate the need for zips, other trimmings and complex machinery. The project can therefore support makers from situations of hardship, even in remote parts of the world. The project provides appropriate training, resources and a growing network of customers. The pricing structure reflects a growing level of skill and craftsmanship.



Dorcas Dress Project
One of their products

The project has been developed specifically for charity work, based around Christian ethical values.

I also looked at the February and March newsletters to read about the development of work in Leicester. In February Maria wrote: 'A century ago, Leicester was an international hub for textiles and "clothed the world" but more recently the city has been plagued by accusations of terrible working conditions and modern-day slavery at the hands of fast fashion.'

I felt that the Dorcas Dress Project might be able to get involved in Leicester, coming alongside garment workers to provide English lessons and share God's love with those too often neglected in the fashion supply chain. We want to become a self-sustaining charity that uses the sales of its dresses to lift people out of poverty around the world. To make this a reality we needed to think beyond our current bespoke small-scale production, so we started to explore a large batch production in a factory in Leicester. The project

has organically grown as we listened to local needs and aspirations to prove there was a core of factories that valued everyone in their workforce. Our aim is to model gentle, kind business practices in an aggressive industry, where we can bring joy to others through our charitable actions, discipleship, and prayer: much like Dorcas did in the early church.'

The crowdfunding was successful and in March Maria wrote about her meetings in Leicester and getting ready for production as well as new trustees as the project has expanded. Having had a Punjabi Christian woman in my Leicester congregation who worked in such factories I was interested in this story and encouraged by it. I conclude with the CMS Community Prayer.

Lord, as you have entered into our life and death
and in all the world you call us into your death and risen life,

forgive us our sins; and draw us we pray;
by the power and encouragement of your Spirit,
into an exchange of gifts and needs, joys and sorrows,
strength and weakness with your people everywhere;
that with them we may have grace to break through very barrier,
to make disciples of all peoples
and to share your love with everyone for your glory's sake. Amen.

Worship song

'Brother, sister, let me serve you', sung here by the Daily Service Singers. Words on screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQaOErUUjm8>.

Intercessions

Alleluia Christ is risen. He is risen indeed Alleluia

Our world is so beautiful especially in Spring when we see growth and flowering all around us. It feels like a message of hope and fruitfulness. But we also see man's inhumanity to man, played out daily on our screens, as we watch the suffering of the people of Ukraine, A very different message of fear and destruction. So we bring both joy and sorrow before you as we come to our time of prayer.

Creator God, the world in which we live is potentially so rich in beauty and wonder but we have failed to care for it as we should. We pray for the wisdom and strength to right wrongs, to find ways to amend our lives to serve your purpose. Teach us to listen more intently to your Word, to protect the fearful, to encourage the faint-hearted, to care for the sad and, in very truth, to love our neighbour. We hear your words Lord, '*Let not your hearts be troubled*'. Help us to pay attention to that as we seek to do your work on earth.

Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer

Almighty God, we pray for the leaders of the nations as we ask that they would have the courage to make right judgements and plans for the future. Plans which will be good, though probably unpopular and that they may see what will be for the benefit of all and not just the few. May Christ's teaching prevail in His example of service and sacrifice. Help us all to heed your words '*I am the way, the truth and the life*'

Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer

Dear Lord there are always people known to us who stand in need of healing whether in body, mind or spirit. In a moment of quiet can we name and bring them to you for relief from their troubles. Let us hold them in your presence now
(please keep a moment of silence here)

Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer

Finally Father God, we would offer you our humble and hearty thanks for all the blessings of this life that we receive. May we never take them for granted and keep praising you for every kindly word spoken, every happy smile, every gentle touch we encounter daily. But most of all we thank you for the knowledge of that great love which led your Son to die upon the cross for the sins of the whole world, and for the gift of a promise that, if we believe, we shall one day have a place in your eternal kingdom.

Lord in your mercy Hear our prayer

As we continue our journey through this Eastertide we await the promise of your Holy Spirit to comfort us all our days

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son Jesus Christ. Amen

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,



for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to Veni Sancti Spiritus – Come Holy Spirit – part of our preparation during this period for Pentecost. Sung by the choir of St David's church with Nigel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvSmTsqJ3IY>



Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Post Communion Collect

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection,
and give us grace to follow in his steps;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Closing Prayer

Christ has no body now on earth but yours;
No hands but yours;
No feet but yours;
Yours are the eyes
Through which is to look out
Christ's compassion to the world;

Yours are the feet
With which he is to go about
Doing good;
Yours are the hands
With which he is to bless now.

(St Teresa of Avila (16th century)).

Blessing

My dearest Lord.
Be Thou a bright flame before me.
Be Thou a guiding star above me.
Be Thou a smooth path beneath me.
Be Thou a kindly shepherd behind me.
Today and evermore.

(St Columba)

Closing Music

'How can I keep from singing. You probably don't know this song, but it was originally published in 1868 in the New York Observer. It has been reworked from time to time by others, notably Pete Seeger and Enya. Words are below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLPP3XmYxXg>

My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation,
I hear the sweet, tho' far-off hymn
That hails a new creation;
Thro' all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul—
How can I keep from singing?

What tho' my joys and comforts die?
The Lord my Saviour liveth;
What tho' the darkness gather round?
Songs in the night he giveth.
No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that refuge clinging;
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,
How can I keep from singing?

I lift my eyes; the cloud grows thin;
I see the blue above it;
And day by day this pathway smooths,
Since first I learned to love it,
The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,
A fountain ever springing;
All things are mine since I am his—
How can I keep from singing?



Resurrection by Lu Lan (Contemporary Chinese)