

Finding pasture

Notes on the Bible readings

- Penning the sheep in for the night back in Jesus' time was very different from farming today. Although the sheep would be securely hemmed in by stone walls or similar, there would be a space where, instead of a gate, the shepherd would lie down: to watch his sheep, and to be alert should an enemy seek to attack.

- Once again, the disciples don't seem to understand Jesus' message about being a shepherd, and ask him what he means. Jesus says that not everyone will understand, but we need ears to hear. Listening to Jesus' voice is key to this analogy, as he says that the sheep will not follow the voice of a stranger, but they recognise the voice of the shepherd and will follow him to abundance.

- What does abundance look like to you? In the Early Church, it meant having enough to share, being generous, and ensuring that no one goes without. It meant being with and worshipping alongside each other - and through this, adding to their daily. Abundance is this picture of having enough, with enough to share. How often do we live in that kind of abundance?

Lecto Divina

The aim is to pay attention to which words resonate or strike a chord with you. Read Psalm 23 slowly, with a pause at the end of each verse (read it aloud to yourself; in a group, read verses in turn). Leave a minute of silence after the end, then read it again in the same way. Repeat a third time. Think about words that stood out for you, carry them with you and return to them again and again over the course of the day.

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Questions for reflection

- ▶ What feelings does this image evoke in you?
- ▶ When have you experienced 'enough with enough to share'?
- ▶ Does your church offer opportunities for sharing abundance?



A prayer of approach

*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 for others

*Loving God, we pray for those whose lives are empty;
for all who feel alone and unloved;
for those whose lives lack, or have recently lost, purpose.*

*We pray for those whose lives are filled with anger and bitterness;
for those who cannot let go of the past,
and so have little present or future hope in their lives.*

*We pray for those whose lives are filled with anguish and pain;
for those who suffer in the current crisis;
for those who are afraid to go to work because of the risks;
for those who cannot see a way forward.*

*We pray for those who live on the edge;
for those who watch others enjoy life but are unable to join in;
for those who lack faith; and for those whom others ignore.*

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

A personal prayer

*Thank you for abundant life; thank you for your generous love.
Help me to love generously that others may also experience the
abundance of your life. Amen.*

Live your faith

While we all feel that we lack 'abundance' in areas of our lives, the truth can be a little different. Go through your kitchen cupboards or your wardrobe, and choose something to share through a local food bank or charity shop when the opportunity arises.

I am the way

Notes on the Bible readings

- This week's Gospel passage is perhaps best known for its use at funerals. But Jesus' words offer more than the promise of a place prepared for the future. He also promises that he will remain with the disciples, even when he is physically gone from them.

- In his unique writing style, John illustrates the complex relationship between God present now as trinity and the (not-yet) promise of the kingdom to come. The relationship is close - whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father. This is why Jesus can assure the disciples that they will not be left abandoned, and that he himself is both the way that they need to travel and the means.

- There is a theme within these readings of being joined to God in an unbreakable relationship. 1 Peter speaks about believers being built together like living stones. Jesus assures his disciples that they will be united in and with him. The Gospel passage ends with a command and a promise (v.12): 'the one who believes in me will also to the works that I do'. Through a life lived in 'the way', we are commissioned to follow Jesus' example: feeding the poor, caring for those who are hurting, and sharing God's love.

The way

Make a simple labyrinth, inside or outside, using rope, string or pebbles. (Search the internet for example to copy). Make it as large as space and resources allow. Walk the path you have laid out, imagining that Jesus is walking with you. Ask (pray) that Jesus will show you the way in your daily life. Take as much time as you need, pausing from time to time to think about whatever comes to mind.

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Questions for reflection

- ▶ What do you use to help you find the way?
- ▶ How does it feel that Jesus has prepared a way and a place for each of us?
- ▶ When are the most difficult times to recognise Jesus as the way?



A prayer of approach

*Together, Lord, we come to seek the 'Jesus way'.
May we know your truth and your presence in all that we are.
May we receive new life, and be empowered to serve you in all that we do. Amen.*

A prayer for others

*In the world at this time there is so much fear,
many have had their lives and livelihoods destroyed;
many grieve for loved ones who have died;
many are still sick - or fear becoming so:
that they may all know your strength and peace, loving God -
be for them a rock and a stronghold.*

*In a world where industries and infrastructures have failed,
where means of transport and delivery struggle to survive,
where many do not have adequate food, water or power:
that they may know your strength and peace, loving God -
be for them a rock and a stronghold.*

*In a world where many people are or feel alone;
where many do not know where to look for comfort;
where many see no purpose or future:
that they may know your strength and peace, loving God -
be for them a rock and a stronghold.*

In the name of the living Lord Jesus. Amen.

A personal prayer

*Show me your way; help me to know your truth,
and to live your life. Amen.*

Live your faith

Remember that, for you, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Try to think of a practical consequence of that in or for whatever you are about to do, wherever that may be.

The Spirit beside us

Notes on the Bible readings

- This passage follows last week's. Jesus expands on what he said about following in his way by explaining how we put the idea into action: by loving Jesus and keeping his commandments.
- This relationship between loving Jesus and keeping his commandments is not a case of 'prove that you love me!'. Rather, it is Jesus explaining how loving him enables us to keep his commandments - a reminder that Jesus' commands are all rooted in a loving relationship: loving God and loving others.
- Jesus also explains that we are not expected to do this on our own; we have the Holy Spirit as our 'advocate'. The Greek word literally means the one 'called to your side' and could equally be translated as 'intercessor', 'counsellor' or 'intermediary'. Crucially, the term means someone who will never desert us in our hour of need. This then flows on naturally to discussing our relationship with Jesus and with the Father; this is all bound up in that oneness with God that ensures that we are not left on our own.

The way

The commands that Jesus urges us to keep are practical and everyday in nature. The current lockdown and social distancing rules have resulted in many examples of love in action, and also highlighted situations crying out for love to be expressed in a practical way.

Look (using the internet, perhaps?) for examples in your locality or network of contacts. Can you find one or two ideas to pursue further - either on your own, or as a household?

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Questions for reflection

- ▶ How might this image speak of relationship?
- ▶ How easy is it to follow Jesus' command to offer unconditional and practical love, following his example?
- ▶ What sort of things do you regularly do for other people, just because you love them?



A prayer of approach

*Gracious God, we come before you,
drawn by the power of your welcoming love.
We come with our sorrows and joys.
We come with our expectations and apprehensions.
We come with what we have done.
We come as who we are.
In your love we find peace and hope. Amen.*

A prayer for others

*God of love, we are sorry that at times our love for you falters;
that we have wrong priorities, and overlook your guidance.
O God, forgive us and renew us.*

*Loving Saviour, we are sorry that we disobey your commandments;
that we fail to love, and sometimes walk by on the other side.
O God, forgive us and renew us.*

*Spirit of truth, we are sorry that we disregard your presence;
that our thoughts and feelings are unrighteous, and that
we so quickly follow the world's way.
O God, forgive us and renew us.*

*May your presence abiding in us lead us in the right way,
in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

A personal prayer

*I am your child, O God:
Help me always to show love,
and fill me with the Spirit of truth. Amen.*

Live your faith

Wherever you go this week, look for examples of Jesus' command being fulfilled, and opportunities to demonstrate love in action. If you can, do it.

Live your faith 24-30 May 2020

Read, pray, reflect at home this week

 This week's Bible readings Acts 1.6-14 • 1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11 • John 17.1-11

Glorify my name

Notes on the Bible readings

- As the Gospel reaches the climax, John presents Jesus' last 'speech', which is in fact a prayer, crying out to his Father the desires of his heart, that through his actions to come God would be glorified. There is something here of the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit lifting one another up to be glorified; something the theologian Richard Rohr calls the 'divine dance' of the Trinity, in which each part glorifies another, but never itself.
- The term glory - often associated with heavenly light - has other meanings. The crucifixion will be the hour in which Jesus is glorified. Jesus has also glorified his Father by finishing the work he was sent to do. And Jesus even says that he has been glorified in his disciples. Glory is deeply relational and mutual: Jesus asks the Father to glorify the Son so that the Son may glorify the Father. Glory is something to bestow on another.
- Here is the great challenge for us today, as followers of Jesus that we would continue to lift him up, and bring glory to God through our actions and our relationship with one another, echoing the relationship between the Trinity – as Jesus prayed: 'that they would be one, as we are one'.

Superheroes

In many superhero films, one (or more) of the heroes dies, or is prepared to do so, to save the world. Think of examples – especially, any examples where the hero dies and returns to life. What connections and similarities can you see between the fictional heroes and Jesus? How much influence do you think the Christian story has had on the fictional? How might we use people's favourite superhero story to tell something of the Christian one?

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Questions for reflection

- ▶ What do you think these three figures are doing?
- ▶ What sort of things do you 'glorify' by the way you live?
- ▶ How best can we lift each other up?



A prayer of approach

*Lord of all glory,
we come before you seeking your wisdom
that we may glorify you through our thinking;
we come seeking your love,
that we may glorify you through our emotions;
we come seeking your strength,
that we may glorify you at all times;
we come seeking your perseverance,
that we may glorify you in all places.
Show us how to live, that our lives shine with your glory,
and those who encounter us may know you
and that you are at work in your world. Amen.*

A prayer for others

*We bring before you, O God, our concerns for our world:
where there is violence, we pray for peace;
where there is sickness we pray for health;
where there is despair we pray for hope.
We pray that you would be active in health care:
in the work of doctors and dentists,
psychiatrists and psychologists,
nurses and administrators,
pharmacists and researchers.
Guide our activity in the church:
may we find ways to grow; may we always honour you;
may we serve our communities.
Lord, hear us, heal us and shine through our lives.
In Jesus' name. Amen.*

A personal prayer

Lord, may your glory be seen in what I do and who I am. Amen.

Live your faith

In any situation you find yourself in this week, look for an opportunity to do something that will glorify or lift up God/Jesus.

Let anyone

Notes on the Bible readings

- Pentecost! To some it is the birth-day of the Church. It is the day we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, overflowing and pouring out over the gathered disciples who were then 'poured out' from their hiding place into the community around them, sharing God's story with confidence, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

- The miraculous power of the Holy Spirit brings the people together from their different tribes and nations. All are able to hear and understand the word of God. Here, the good news of Jesus becomes the invitation: 'let anyone'. Here, everyone can hear, understand and respond to this open invitation. There are echoes in the passage from Acts of the Gospel reading. In the latter, Jesus invites people to come to him. He will pour out water to anyone who thirsts for him, promising them the Holy Spirit. In Acts, the promise is delivered.

- Today, we too hear the story in a language we can understand; the promised pouring out of the Holy Spirit is for us too, when we respond to the same invitation. Like Peter and his companions, this must lead to us pouring out of our 'hiding places', and sharing the good news with those around us.

Water, wind and fire

Pentecost is a day (like Christmas and Easter) for the church to shout out. Using whatever resources you have, make a display or a poster for your window that proclaims the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in water, wind or fire - or any combination of them. During 'lockdown', there have been many examples of ways to make birthdays special - make the church's birthday special today!

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Questions for reflection

- ▶ Where might the water be flowing from, and to, in this image?
- ▶ Is the unifying power of the Spirit perceptible in your church life?
- ▶ ...and in your own life?



A prayer of approach

Pour out your Spirit, loving Lord, that your sons and your daughters may hear your prophetic word.

Pour out your Spirit, loving Lord, that your sons and your daughters may know how to live according to your ways.

Pour out your Spirit, loving Lord, that your sons and your daughters may worship you in spirit and in truth. Amen.

A prayer for others

Holy Spirit of peace, we pray for homes and nations where there is discord and conflict. Pour out your breath of peace that people may listen to each other; may respect one another; may honour each other.

Holy Spirit of hope, we pray for those who live in despair; for those who can see no purpose in their lives; for those who cannot see a way ahead; for those who feel completely alone.

Holy Spirit of unity, we pray for your Church, for its ministry to the faithful; for its mission to the world. May the Spirit of Pentecost breathe upon us, that we may witness to the world the comfort, meaning and love that you offer.

Heal our differences and make us one in you. Amen.

A personal prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill my home with peace.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill my heart with love.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill my life with your power.

Amen.

Live your faith

Pay particular attention to how you use water this week, and think about how you might change your habits to conserve it more. Each time you use water, pray that God's Spirit might be like living water in your life.

Worship and witness

Notes on the Bible readings

- Matthew 28.16-20 are the concluding words of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus gathers his disciples together on the mountain to speak his last words over them, before he ascends to heaven. The details of the ascension are not explored here, as Matthew chooses to place his emphasis on Jesus' final instructions.

- In verse 17, Matthew explores how all the disciples worshipped him, though some doubted. Even here, in this community of worship, there is room for doubters, those who have questions to ask. The Greek words are actually both participles, 'worshipping' and 'doubting', so it could be that the same disciples are doing both actions.

- The words of Jesus' closing command over his followers, in verse 19, 'Go...and make disciples...' often loses its emphasis in translation: 'Go' was not the instruction, but rather, 'As you are going...make disciples.' The understanding is that Jesus' disciples will move out from this place, and as they do so, their instruction is to make more disciples.

- These readings for today all share a focus on the importance of words – in creation, in reconciliation, in making new disciples. But these words are not to be empty; they become life-giving for the world when they derive their power from the very character of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This final commission is our commission too. Wherever we are going, we are to make disciples, passing on the story and bringing others into our family of faith.

For reflection and comment linking this week's Bible reading to the news, current issues and events, go to www.rootsontheweb.com and click on PostScript.



Questions for reflection

- ▶ Does this scene look like something you could get 'caught up' in?
- ▶ What encourages you to become a witness to others?
- ▶ What is the most powerful experience of worship you have had?



A prayer of approach

*O God, you are at the heart of creation.
Your word brings life into being;
your peace gives living its fulfilment;
your Spirit unites us into your Son.
We draw near, seeking your love in our hearts;
your wisdom in our minds; your power in our lives.
Receive us with grace, in the name of your Son. Amen.*

A prayer for others

*In homes filled with anger, cruelty and neglect;
where there are no safe places;
where poverty and addiction bring suffering and pain:
God of peace, may your peace be known.
To those whose minds are tormented by depression;
to those whose hold on life is fragile;
to those whose lives are filled with stress:
God of peace, may your peace be known.
To those who are nearing the end of life;
to those who love and care for them:
God of peace, may your peace be known.
May your peace be known to us, and may we be bearers of your peace in our world. Amen.*

A personal prayer

*Dear God, may I
Live
In
Faith
Eternally.*

Live your faith

Carry out three acts of 'faith sharing' this week. For example: offer a word of encouragement to someone you know; speak about your faith to a friend or family member; offer a gift to a charitable organization.

Call to action

Notes on the Bible readings

- The backdrop to this scene is Jesus' miracles of healing. The disciples have experienced these incredible events. Jesus sends them out to mirror his actions: to heal and preach. In doing this, he also commissions them: giving them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to cure every disease and sickness.

- Jesus warns of the dangers that the disciples face, likening it to sheep facing wolves. But he assures them that they are to stand firm in the Father's protection and will be given the words to say from the Holy Spirit.

- Being God's people can be pictured in various ways. Each shows us something about our relationship with God and each other – and the obligations that come with that identity. The disciples were called to offer the good news of God's love to all. Jesus describes the people they will serve as 'lost sheep'. Psalm 100 also describes 'his people' as 'sheep'. These passages speak of the people of God as sheep, needing tending and guiding. But with a calling to teach and proclaim to others the good news of God.

- As Christians we are called to mirror Jesus and the disciples, to 'Go out' into the world. But this passage reminds us that we don't do that in our own strength. When we do not have the words to say, the same Spirit of the Father that spoke to the disciples can speak to and through us.

Questions for reflection

- ▶ How does this image relate to your experiences of going away?
- ▶ What do you think gives us, today, Jesus' authority to go out and make disciples?
- ▶ When you do most feel like you are doing Jesus' work?



A prayer of praise

*We unite with the whole world in praising you, creator God.
We come before you with gladness and thanksgiving.
We praise your goodness; we praise your faithfulness;
we praise your tenderness.
We are yours and we worship you.
We bless your name for ever.
Amen.*

A prayer for others

Loving Lord, you call and equip us to serve you. Watch over those who risk their own safety by caring for oppressed believers. Strengthen and protect all those who are persecuted for sharing their faith in places where living out their Christian faith in peace is not allowed.

*Loving Lord, you empower us to live out our discipleship. Give wisdom, imagination and the strength to persevere to those who face apathy as they seek to live out their discipleship.
Loving Lord, you understand what it means to suffer for what is right. Give comfort and courage to those who are unjustly imprisoned, intimidated and tortured because of their faith.
In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray.
Amen.*

A personal prayer

*Lord, may I know your guidance as I seek to be a faithful disciple in the places to which you send me.
Amen.*

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Live your faith

Every time you go through a doorway this week, think about being sent out by Jesus to share the good news – who could you share some good news with?

When the going gets tough

Notes on the Bible readings

- In this passage from Matthew, we see Jesus preparing his disciples for their mission. He warns them of the threats and challenges they are likely to face. They are called to go out and take on their mission completely reliant on God, in order that they might build up trust and relationship with him.
- Jesus warns that following him will not be easy, that there will be sacrifices and suffering, but that the Lord will be with them. He tells them not to fear all these things, including death, as no one is powerful enough to destroy both body and soul (vv.10.26-28). He also talks of our great value to God. He values us enough to know how many hairs we have on our heads, and so will protect and keep us.
- Jeremiah – in the Old Testament – has also made great sacrifices; he is constantly persecuted, even by his friends, for the prophecies he brings. But what we sacrifice to be a disciple of Jesus will be repaid in abundance – as we are reminded in Paul's letter to the Romans when Paul talks of the hope and freedom we have in Christ.
- Being a disciple of Jesus doesn't mean that all our problems will vanish, but our challenge is to continue striving to be a disciple even through the hardship, knowing that Jesus will walk alongside us. We are valued by him and rewarded through relationship with him.

Questions for reflection

- ▶ How would you feel about being presented with a challenge like this?
- ▶ How could you finish the sentence 'When the going gets tough...?'
- ▶ How can you support one another through the challenging realities of being a disciple of Jesus?



A prayer of approach

O Lord, we enter into your steadfast love, asking that you will respond to our prayers; we trust in your abundant mercy and ask that you will come to us.

O Lord, make your presence known to us; draw near to us; redeem us, set us free; for we seek to be your faithful disciples. Amen.

A prayer for others

We pray for those whom you have called to service far from their homes – doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, and many more... We pray for those who serve you in the church – those who clean, make tea and wash up, arrange flowers, offer a welcome, and many more...

We pray for those who serve you by telling your story – those who teach, lead assemblies, speak at meetings, preach the gospel, and many more...

We pray for own discipleship, that we may face our challenges with courage.

May our united discipleship further your work and help to establish your promised kingdom.

In your name, we pray. Amen.

A personal prayer

Praise God who made me.

Praise Jesus who has called me.

Praise the Spirit who empowers me. Amen.

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Live your faith

Find out about some persecuted Christians (e.g. through the work of Open Doors, in over 70 countries). Consider how what you learn can inspire or help you in living out your faith – especially 'when the going gets tough'.

In the name of...

Notes on the Bible readings

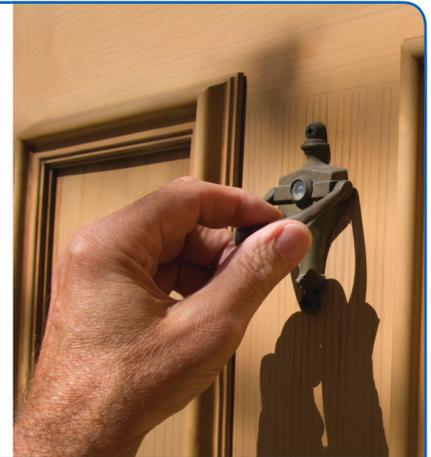
- Here the disciples have been sent out 'in the name of Jesus', proclaiming the same good news and performing the same good works as him. They share in his poverty and are called to go out into new places, taking no extras with them; no clothes, shoes or food – they have to rely solely on the hospitality of others.
- This call to be welcoming and to be welcomed is incredibly significant, as in those days, identity of a person was very much tied into family and community. In showing hospitality to one person, you were in fact welcoming the whole family or whole community they were a part of. So, welcoming someone who had come 'in the name of Jesus' was actually extending welcome and hospitality to Jesus himself.
- The Gospel and the reading from Jeremiah are both concerned with the ways in which the people of God, bringing the message of God, are received by others. As such, they demonstrate that the reception is not always positive. Jesus warns that not everyone will welcome them or be very accepting of what they have to share, and that they might well experience hostility, just like Jesus did. However, we are also warned in the readings that at the end of the age, there will be profound consequences. It can be difficult sometimes to be welcoming or to accept hospitality from others, especially when we've never met them before. How welcoming are we to those we come across?

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Questions for reflection

- ▶ How do you feel when someone knocks on your door and you're not sure who it is?
- ▶ What do you do to welcome newcomers to your church?
- ▶ Describe the best welcome you have ever received in someone's home.



A prayer of approach

O God, your Spirit draws us into your presence, and so we come – drawn by love, upheld by grace – to encounter Jesus, our Saviour. We know him as our master. We know him as our friend. In him we see the Father, whose love sent Jesus to us. Spirit, Son and Father, we draw close in faith to offer our praise and worship. Amen.

A prayer for others

We pray for those on the fringes of society; for those who feel rejected; for those who are overlooked; for those whom others avoid. May they know they are welcome in your kingdom. May they know the welcome of your love. We pray for those who are lonely. We pray for those in prison; especially those kept in isolation. We pray for children excluded from school; for their families and those with responsibility for their education. Loving God, as you welcome us, may we welcome others with warmth and steadfast love. Amen.

A personal prayer

Lord, thank you for all the welcomes I receive. Help me always to be welcoming. Amen.

Live your faith

Make an effort to engage someone new in conversation, remembering that you are God's representative to them.