

Shepherd

22 4 18

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things that are above,
where he reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God now and forever.

Our text may be found in today's gospel – John chapter 10 and verse 11:

'I am the good shepherd.'

Do you ever come into church and take a fresh look at any of our stained glass windows ? They are possibly so familiar that you take them for granted but depending on the time of day and where and if the sun is shining, they can be so very beautiful. The best one is the one of St Philip by the pulpit. All together, our windows are a mixture of British, French, American and German art and, visually, they embody the story of our faith in pictures and symbols.

So, given today's sermon is on Christ the good shepherd, I'd urge you look again at the beautiful pre-Raphaelite interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus gently cradling the sheep in his arms and bringing him carefully back home.

Psalm 23 is the classic expression of God as our shepherd. A favourite at weddings and funerals, this psalm presents the Lord our God as our shepherd, looking after us, caring for us, guiding us, so that in life and in death we are not alone and that, one day, we will come home to the heavenly banquet that awaits us.

John's gospel, from which our text today is taken, defines a good shepherd as someone who is prepared to lay down his life for his flock. Just a month ago, on Friday 23rd March, Lieutenant Commander Arnaud Beltrame of the Gendarmerie in Carcassonne, a Catholic, a freemason, did the same during a hostage situation in a supermarket in Trèbes. The point Jesus is making here is that the care of the shepherd's sheep is so deep-rooted in his heart and being that the good shepherd is prepared to sacrifice his own life to insure the lives of his flock. It is a picture of confidence in which the shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep recognise the voice of their shepherd.

And the fact that Jesus died in order to bring salvation and healing to his flock, the chosen people, the Jews, is the essential message that Peter has to say to the Sanhedrin in this morning's reading from Acts. Surprisingly, challengingly, even after Jesus' execution, healing is still possible in his name.

And, lastly, this is the message from John's First Epistle, the message of this season of Easter: that Jesus is prepared to lay down his life for us. And why? Because he loves us! And if God loves us, then we should love each other, however difficult that might in practice prove.

Here, in France, folk often think of me as a pastor and call me «Monsieur le pasteur» though I'm quick to say, « Non, je suis le Prêtre Anglican de Dinard. » But, of course, they are right in one sense: a priest is also a pastor, a shepherd of his flock. It's my job to care for the souls of the folk who'll let me, my task to try guide and help those who will let me do so.

May God bless my ministry to you and may you safely graze in green pastures beside the still waters.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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