**Worship sheet for Sunday 25th April 2021**

**Compiled by Pauline Zahner of Hilton Methodist Church**

**Call to Worship:**

Good Shepherd of the Sheep,lead us and guide usto hear your message for us today.

**Hymn:** Singing the Faith 481 or Hymns and Psalms 70 - The Lord’s my Shepherd

The Lord’s my Shepherd <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MG0>

**Prayers** (adapted from Roots)

Lord, we praise you for your goodness and love, your wisdom and guidance.

A year ago, your house was not a fold in which we could meet. Confined to our homes, we prayed as a silent wolf prowled the world, a pandemic that threatened us all. We thank you for watching over us, and for those of us who were safely delivered. We thank you that we were still able to reach out to one another and still to worship – but in different ways. We thank you for those in our communities who had been taken for granted, overlooked, not considered of great importance, but on whom we came to rely to save lives. Good Shepherd, who knows suffering and sacrifice beyond our imagining, we thank you that we are here today, enfolded in your love. **Amen.**

Forgive us, Lord, when we fail to show others the love that you have shown us, when we stay in our comfort zone and avoid giving in a sacrificial way to serve the needs of others. Lord, who lays down your life for your sheep, how can we doubt your forgiveness? Arms once stretched out upon a cross now close in embrace as we return; enfolded, may we know the fullness of love that lives to forgive, and forgives that we might live. **Amen.**

**Psalm 23**

Jesus said “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me”

Reflect on Psalm 23 as you ask yourself: how well do I know my Good Shepherd?

**Hymn**: The King of love my shepherd is - Singing the Faith 479 or Hymns and Psalms 69

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

**Readings**:

John 10 verses 11-18

1 John 3 verses 16-24

**Reflection**

Both John 10 verses 11-18 and 1 John 3 verses 16-24 focus on the relationship Jesus has with his loving father and with his disciples whom he loves. God loved the world so much he gave his only Son to be crucified on a cross and rise 3 days later. Jesus loved his father so much that he obeyed and went the way of the cross so that we might be forgiven, thus also showing his absolute love for his disciples – and that includes us, of course.

****As Christians, as we see in epistle reading, we are called to believe in God the father and God the Son (Jesus) and to love one another. If we believe in God, then we know that God’s love is in us and we will obey the commandment Jesus gave us to love one another. The texts invite us to reflect on what love looks like in everyday life. In verse 18 of the epistle in “The Message” version of the Bible, we read “let’s not just talk about love; let’s practise real love”. Love in not a matter for debate but requires action. Like our Good Shepherd, we should know our fellow sheep, our brothers and sister and be alert to their needs, see what they are lacking and respond with generosity and kindness. This means that we are called to avoid staying in our comfort zone and give only what we can spare and what we have left over. We are charged with being prepared to choose to make sacrifices for individuals but also for the welfare and good of our community.

If we don’t care deeply for our neighbours and engage in loving deeds, we are like the ineffective shepherds in the reading from the gospel who, typically, have no relationship with the sheep they shepherd, work for money and not to serve the needs of their flock. When danger approaches or things get difficult they simply run away, presumably to escape danger but also to look for another opportunity from which to draw profit, status and money. Bad as this is, the situation is actually even worse because by running away themselves they leave the weak and vulnerable at the mercy of a wolf against whom they have no hope of defence. The community is scattered, divided and may be reduced.

It seems likely that when the writer of the gospel composed his text he was probably thinking not just of the poor “shepherd” leaders of the early part of the first century AD (at the time of Jesus) but also of those of the latter part of the century when he was writing. In question are the political, military and religious leaders who when the Romans were closing in took the easier if not easy way out and escaped possible capture, imprisonment and ultimately slavery and left those in their charge to the whim of the invading forces. It would be nice to think that this sort of thing didn’t happen anymore but I suspect that we can all think of people we know or know of who are more interested in lining their pockets than showing true concern for those in their care. We may know or know of people who are so remote from others that they cannot understand, let alone respond compassionately to, the issues of those around them.

**Challenge:**

The Good Shepherd is identified by his service to and sacrifice for others. How well do we match up to the Good Shepherd’s service and sacrifice? Whose needs are we serving this week? Are we choosing to sacrifice or suffer for anyone this week?

**Prayers for others**

We pray for those Christians across the world who are loving others so much that they are suffering in the service and ministry, especially those who are nursing the sick in countries where there is little PPE and no vaccines. We ask for courage and strength for those imprisoned for their faith. We pray for those trying to offer support to people in countries at war, whose citizens fear for their lives and stability. We pray especially for those suffering in Myanmar, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Syria. We pray for those making difficult decisions this week.

Lord, we know that you are walking beside all of those in need and pray that they will be aware of your presence with them.

Finally, we pray for ourselves that our eyes be opened to see the needs around us, that our voices be used to speak up for the marginalised and the poor, that our hands be used to reach out in comfort and that our lives be used to improve the lives of others. **Amen**

**Hymn** Guide me O Thou great Jehovah - Singing the Faith 465 or Hymns and Psalms 437 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2QvFKKCzzs>

**Sending out Prayer**

Lord, send us out to be faithful sheep of your flock: to love you and all whom we meet on our journey through life, to resolve each day not just to talk about love but to practise it and to be determined to share your good news as often as we can and as fully as we can. **Amen**