**Worship sheet for Sunday 7th March 2021 (Third Sunday in Lent)**

**Compiled by Vivien Almond of Eaton Ford Methodist Church**

I am the Good Shepherd. I am the gate for the sheep.

Call to worship

**7**“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: **8**As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, you abandoned my flock and left them to be attacked by every wild animal. And though you were my shepherds, you didn’t search for my sheep when they were lost. You took care of yourselves and left the sheep to starve. (Ezekiel 34 :7 – 8)

Hymn: – https://youtu.be/FIU1\_g0lP9Q

Let me have my way among you**.** Do not strive, do not strive
Let me have my way among you, Do not strive, do not strive
For mine is the power and the glory, For ever and ever the same
Let me have my way among you, Do not strive, do not strive

We'll let You have Your way among us, We'll not strive, we'll not strive
We'll let You have Your way among us, We'll not strive, we'll not strive
For Yours is the power and the glory, For ever and ever the same
We'll let You have Your way among us, We'll not strive, we'll not strive

Let my peace rule within your hearts, Do not strive, do not strive
Let my peace rule within your hearts, Do not strive, do not strive
For mine is the power and the glory, For ever and ever the same
Let my peace rule within your hearts, Do not strive, do not strive

We'll let Your peace rule within our hearts, We'll not strive, we'll not strive
We'll let Your peace rule within our hearts, We'll not strive, we'll not strive
For Yours is the power and the glory, For ever and ever the same
We'll let Your peace rule within our hearts, We'll not strive, we'll not strive

Prayer

Loving God, as we think about the times you declared ‘I am’ and especially ‘I am the Good Shepherd’ ‘I am the gate for the sheep’, we thank you for laying your life across the gateway and protecting us, your sheep, from those who would come to do harm.

Lord God we remember the times we have acted like bad shepherds, ignoring those in need, saying what should not be spoken, doing what should not be done, but more Lord we are truly sorry for the omissions we have made, the times we turned our back or ran away, Lord we seek your forgiveness, and ask that you would guide us to only do Your will.

Lord God we thank you for your promise that when we turn to you and confess our wrongs you give us your unconditional forgiveness.

Lord we praise you because we can, we praise you with grateful hearts, we praise you with our whole being, and now Lord we ask you to bless this time in worship. Amen

The Lord’s Prayer or Alternative Lord’s Prayer

O Lord you reside in glory, we glorify you and thank you for the knowledge of eternal life.

Lord we long for the day when all people on earth do your will.

We ask you to feed us on your love, grant us peace in our hearts when we find it difficult to forgive, help us to find the way to live in freedom, doing your will through Grace.

For you are the God of love, peace and joy. Your Kingdom is the only place of true safety. Amen (Vivien Almond)

Reading: Ezekiel 34 : 1 – 10 - **The Shepherds of Israel**

If we needed preparation for our Gospel reading today, then we can see it here in the Prophet Ezekiel’s message from God to the Israelites, we can feel in it God’s dismay, anger, disappointment with those He called to be Shepherds to His flock and the love He has for the abandoned sheep, rejected from the fold, too much trouble for the leaders of the church in Israel to care about, whilst they feasted and revelled in plenty they let the sheep starve, become homeless, and suffer in many ways.

The verse we need to be mindful of for today is verse ten, the result of the disobedience was to have all responsibility taken away, and to watch as God cares for those they neglected. We will hear more about the rescue in our Gospel reading.

Hymn: StF 666/H&P 535 - Master speak, thy servant heareth <https://youtu.be/miWHJKLnh7Y>

Reading: John 10 : 1 – 18 - **The Good Shepherd and His Sheep**

These two passages remind me of those pictures were you have to ‘spot the difference’, when we read them together they are complete contrasts of each other, here is the prime example of what God was calling the Israelite leaders to be, protecting the sheep God sent to them, here is the Shepherd willing to lay down His life to protect His sheep, and these are no longer just those descended from the ones chosen and delivered to the promised land, here Jesus talks about ‘other sheep’. Jesus came for everyone and He knows all His sheep by name.

If you have ever worked in an exceptionally large organisation, it is not often that the person at the top knows everyone who works for them by their Christian name. I worked for local government many years ago, our offices were spread over 5 different sites in a radius of about 70 miles, most of the staff in one office had no idea of the staff in the other offices, I couldn’t tell you all the different roles in that organisation, never mind the people who filled them.

How amazing is it then that God knows each of us as individuals, unique, special, called to be a disciple.

This comes with responsibility, we are called to be Good Sheep, willing to listen, willing to be led out to carry out our calling, we are not called to be trapped in the sheep pen, or the Church’s we attend, we are not called to be stagnant, in Andrea Skevington’s book on the ‘I am’ sayings she says ‘Sometimes the Christian life can feel all about keeping safe. It can feel all about avoiding sin and temptation, avoiding the dangers that are ‘out there’, staying safe in churches. A sheepfold, where the sheep are kept in all the time, will become a very unsavoury, smelly place, the grass won’t last long, and the sheep will become hungry and unwell’. *(Jesus said I am, Finding life in the everyday page 82-83).*

It's easy sometimes to sit back and say “We’re here on a Sunday and we’re a very welcoming church, we are really open to new people coming”, but a) not want to go out to where people are in the most need and show God’s love in action, b) want the newcomers to tow the line, not to rock them out of their complacency, c) get defensive at any suggestion of change “We’ve done it like that for two hundred years” is so often heard.

God cares about the outcast, the homeless, the hungry, the refugee, the abused, the fearful, the mentally and physically less able……. I could go on but I think you get the picture, all are God’s creation, all are equal under God.

The church is the place we can gather in fellowship, worship God and be strengthened and renewed, a place to share, but it is also the place we are led out of by the movement of the Holy Spirit to come together and serve those in need, fight for justice for those under oppression, follow the Good Shepherd.

Are we the robbers and bandits, who sneak into the sheepfold, or are we happy to go through the gate, listen to the Good Shepherd and be led to be obedient to our calling, to be God’s hands here on earth and trust God to recognise our voice and be attentive to His voice? Amen

For a few moments just slowly read the words of this hymn (StF481/H&P 70) – The Lord’s my shepherd <https://youtu.be/-eIQQayhpak>,

The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want; He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters, His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in You alone, And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me, Your goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness, And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy, I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path, I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff Are the comfort I need to know.

Then close your eyes and imagine being led by Jesus, The Good Shepherd through it, imagine Him at the gateway ready to lead you into the future.

Intercessions

Lord God we give thanks for the gift of Jesus The Good Shepherd, who broke the power of sin and death and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Enable us to hear His voice, guide us to act upon our calling.

We pray at this time for all carers, and especially those who reach out to the outcasts, those rejected and the lost

Good Shepherd guide us. And help us always.

Lord God we give thanks for all who seek to bring peace and unity in this war-torn world

We pray especially for those who reach out to refugees.

Good Shepherd guide us. And help us always.

Lord God we thank you for farmers and all who work in the food and drink supplying industry.

We pray especially for those who reach out to the hungry and thirsty.

Good Shepherd guide us. And help us always.

Lord God we give thanks for all who work in the medical field.

We pray especially for those who reach out to the wounded, to those hurting, those trying to deal with difficult pasts, those injured in accidents or attacks and those sick in body, mind or spirit.

Good Shepherd guide us. And help us always.

Lord God we thank you for all who working in hospices and the funeral services.

We pray especially for those who reach out to the dying and bereaved.

Good Shepherd guide us. And help us always.

Time of personal prayer.

Lord God we ask you to gather all our prayers through our ever loving, everlasting Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Hymn: StF 322/H&P 257 - How sweet the name of Jesus sounds <https://youtu.be/AFiYere5NYw>

May the God who sent Jesus guide us every minute, may Jesus The Good Shepherd keep us safe from the robbers and bandits, and may the Holy Spirit enable us to do God’s will, and may we journey through life with our eyes open and ears attentive. Amen