**Worship Sheet for Sunday 18th July 2021**

**Compiled by Rev Pam Siddall of Buckden Methodist Church**

**Call to worship**: O sing to the Lord a new song: sing to the Lord all the

earth.

 Sing to the Lord, bless his name: tell of his salvation from day to day. (from Psalm 96)

**Hymn:** StF 322 or H&P 257 - How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

Verse 4 of the hymn reminds us of all that Jesus means to us. Spend a little time meditating on it and then praise him in prayer.

Prayers of praise and confession

Jesus our Shepherd, brother friend, accept the praise we bring to you this morning. Where earthly leaders and worldly circumstances fail us, you remain our Lord and Saviour, tending our every need with the compassion of God the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not alone: you are with us always. We worship you.

Even as we worship we are aware how little we deserve such grace and love. We often forget to look to you for guidance and feel lost and hopeless when all the time you are beside us. We sometimes wander off track rather that remaining close to your flock and we fail to attend to you and to the needs of each-other as we should. We ask your forgiveness and pray that we may each feel ourselves safely gathered back into the fold and put right with you once more. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer** (We pray remembering that this prayer joins us in worship with Christians world-wide)

**Hymn:** StF 81 or H&P 566 - Now thank we all our God

**Reading: Psalm 23** (Thoughts on the psalm)

David’s Testimony: trusting through tribulation to triumph

We are often reminded that one of the best ways of spreading the good news is simply by telling our own stories of what God has done for us. It has only recently struck me that the first three verses of this psalm are King David’s own testimony, telling out God’s loving care and provision for him, which he recognised through the mirror of his own experience as a shepherd in his younger days. The words are simple and straightforward, a pattern for every one of us when we speak to others about God’s love. **To whom will you speak of God’s love in the coming week?**

From verse 4 David is addressing God himself, expressing trust for the most troubled of times because of what he has experienced of God’s character though-out his life: “…for you are with me”. **What have been the dark valleys in your life? What has strengthened and comforted you? Remind yourself how you are able to trust and lean on God’s presence with us at times of greatest need and offer him your praise.**

In verses 5 & 6, David is perhaps remembering his anointing as a young man, by the prophet Samuel to be the successor to King Saul (Samuel 16, 1-13) as well as many occasions of feasting in his later life to celebrate the triumph of God’s saving goodness to him and his people. However, he also looks to the future in absolute trust in God’s unfailing love which holds him always in the Father’s presence: “…in the house of the Lord”.

**In the light of Jesus’ resurrection, we can understand this as a promise of a place in heaven for all believers, starting right here and now but lasting for all eternity. Today, as we dare to look more hopefully ahead in this current stage of the pandemic and the lifting of lockdown restrictions, let’s also remind ourselves of that greater, eternal hope which Jesus alone can offer as we put our trust in him.**

Prayers of thanksgiving

We thank you, Lord, for the promise (and our experience) that you are with us always, in our times of trouble as much as in our times of triumph. Thank you that we can safely put our trust in you for all that’s to come, assured of our future in your presence. Amen

**Hymn:** StF 481 or 480, or H&P 70 - The Lord’s my shepherd.

**Reading: Mark 6, verses 30-56**

**Thoughts on the gospel**

Through the words of the prophet Ezekiel, we hear the Lord condemning the ‘shepherds’ (i.e. leaders) of the day who, far from tending the flock, were preying on them for their own gain. In chapter 34 verses 11-16 we find God promising: “I myself will search for my sheep…” With echoes of psalm 23, God promises to feed his sheep in good pasture and set them to lie down in safety, to seek the lost, bind up the injured and so much more. Isaiah 40 v.11 says, “he shall feed his flock like a shepherd.” Here in our gospel reading today we see Jesus at work fulfilling these prophecies and his heavenly father’s promises. In John 14 he calls himself the Good Shepherd, whilst Hebrews 13 v. 20 refers to him as ‘the great shepherd of the sheep.’ Beset by needy and demanding crowds where-ever he goes (even when he tries to take his disciples aside to grieve the horrific death of John the Baptist, his cousin) his great compassion takes precedence over his own needs and he teaches, feeds, heals without stint. When he finally takes some time alone (V. 46) he devotes it to prayer, replenishing his own spiritual resources for his work no doubt, but surely also crying out to his Father for the needs of his flock. Scripture tell us that “he sits at God’s right hand to pray for us” even today. What a comforting thought!

Tucked into the middle of all this we find the strange tale of Jesus walking across water to the aid of his terrified disciples in their boat, battling through severe wind conditions on the sea of Galilee. Listen to his words to them, and as he enters the vessel and calms the winds: **“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”** It is significant to me that the Greek original for ‘it is I’ reads simply “I am”: the name God called himself to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus, God’s son, God’s very self is with us in the vessel of our troubled times. Have we felt like lost sheep in these times of pandemic? Our Good Shepherd bids us ‘take heart’ and emerge into the future without fear, testifying as we do so: “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.” **Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

Good Shepherd, we, your church, feel lost and uncertain as we tentatively step forward into opening up for worship in a changed society. Please lead us to find the right paths. Restore our soul and equip us for mission and service once more.

Good Shepherd, the world you love so much (John3, 16) has been travelling through the valley of the shadow of death for many months now. Please bring your healing to the suffering, your comfort to the dying and bereaved and the encouraging presence of your Holy Spirit to offer hope to all.

Good Shepherd, grant your integrity to all who serve as ‘shepherds’ of today’s nations and communities that justice and peace may return to the many places of strife and discord.

Now let us spend some time bringing to the Good Shepherd all the needs that are on our own hearts: our friends and families, our congregations and ministers, sad or troubling items on the news and all our own joys and sorrows. **The Lord hears our prayers. Thanks be to God. Amen**

**Hymn:** StF 67 or H&P 277 – This, this is the God we adore

**Blessing:** “Let us repose, Good Shepherd, in your presence; walk in your path, enjoy your safety, rejoice in your banquet, receive your anointing, drink from your cup and dwell in your house, now and for ever. Amen.” (words of St. Jerome, found in Methodist Prayer Handbook day 2)