



Sunday Reflection

4th Sunday of Easter

in the Charges of St Margaret, Renfrew
& St John, Johnstone

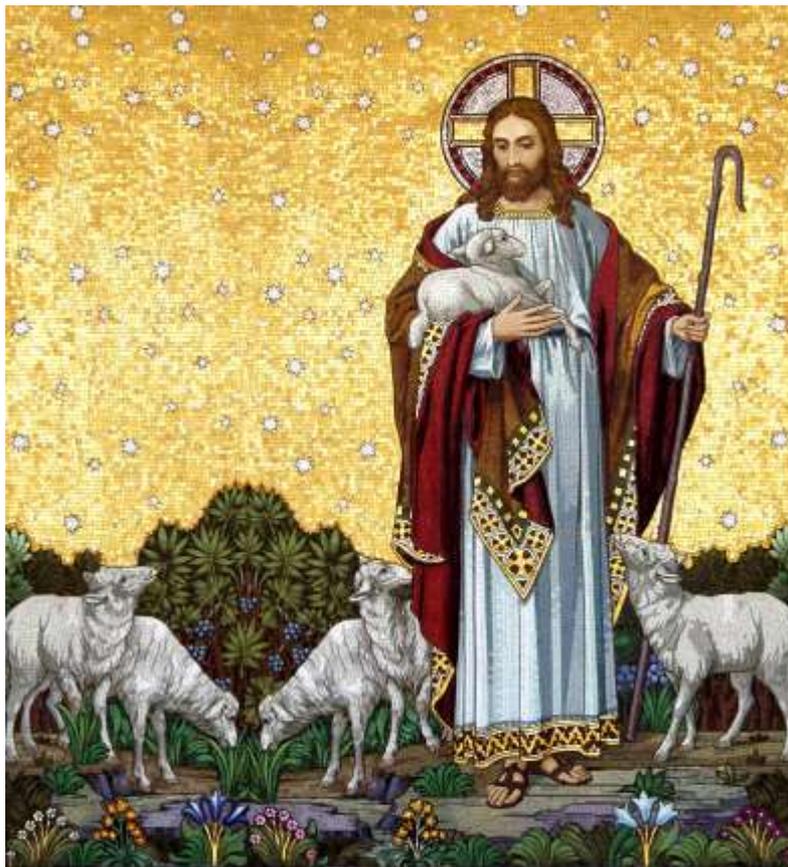


For Sunday 3 May 2020

4th Sunday of Easter

while all Church worship in the buildings is suspended

On this fourth Sunday of the Easter season, the Gospel draws our attention to shepherds and gates, showing us that Jesus offers a model for pastoral care and protection. The other readings point us towards our own vocation; suggesting that we might, likewise, have a care and concern for others, and for the whole of creation.



Reflection for this week's Gospel

"I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture." John 10:9

An Illustration to set the scene

Charlotte was a city dweller. But for one summer her job took her to the heart of the countryside, to live and work in a rented cottage that overlooked sheep fields. Her woolly neighbours were endlessly fascinating, and Charlotte often found herself looking up from her work and becoming absorbed in their antics.

She liked to take a walk in the light evenings, and often ended up leaning on a gate in a country lane, watching the sheep. She found it particularly interesting to think of the Bible stories about sheep.

In her diary she wrote:

"Sheep often behave exactly as their stereotype suggests. They follow one another, unthinking, into the most terrible scrapes. They fall over. They get stuck in hedges, or push their way through the hedges and wander into the road. They are, from my observation at least, foolish, a bit grubby and rather vulnerable. When the Bible, or hymns, suggest that sheep need protection, a townie like myself might assume that they need protection from predators or thieves. My conclusion, from the time I have spent watching them, is that sheep need protection most of all from themselves."

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

The biblical images of shepherds paint them as people of wisdom, care, comfort, reliability, fortitude, sacrifice and protection. In the psalms, the Lord, as the shepherd, protects the flock, carries sheep and lambs, feeds and waters them, gathers them into the fold and fends off anything and anyone that could harm them. In the Gospel parable, it is the shepherd who searches for a single lost sheep, leaving ninety-nine to find

it, who lays it across his shoulders and carries it home. Jesus tells this parable relying on his hearers knowing that this is how a shepherd would behave.

The image of Christ the Good Shepherd is one to ponder, to meditate on, to sing about. Many people, reflecting on the recent or distant past, will acknowledge a sense of God's gentle presence, of being carried through difficult circumstances, or healed and soothed. We have been guided and protected, even in the most difficult times. And when we have behaved foolishly, wandered off and got ourselves stuck in a tricky situation, God has gently guided us back to the right path. Jesus then presents himself as the "gate", the one who both liberates the sheep to find fresh pasture and also encloses and protects them.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives

The Gospel presents us with a challenge, especially when set alongside the other readings. We might reflect on how we have been vulnerable, lost or foolish from time to time in life, and how Christ has called us home. But we ought also to acknowledge those times when we have been called to be shepherds rather than sheep. If Christ is the pattern for our life, then surely, as he is the Good Shepherd, we might strive to be shepherds too. We can be shepherds, caring for others. This means deliberately having a care for those in real danger in our world, having compassion for people who are fearful about life for whatever reason, and being kind to all in need, without limit. We might also be gates, called to offer the liberation of Christ to others. Our words and our deeds can give others a sense of being led to find "pasture", nourishing their spirit and giving life in abundance. We might be encouragers, the openers of eyes and hearts and minds, as well as protectors and people who offer warmth, welcome and safety.

We do this because we believe that God, in Christ, cares for us and has done so throughout our life. We believe that God, in

Christ, is our liberation, our life in abundance. We might also acknowledge those people who, practically and literally, have guided us, cared for us, encouraged us, nourished our souls, healed us and protected us. People who have, like shepherds, looked out for us. We have been cared for, we are cared for, and so, in turn, we care. We are Christ's sheep. But we are also co-shepherds – called to care for those who are vulnerable and offer guidance, that all may dwell safely in the fold.

“I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” John 10:9

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk