



**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 21 APRIL 2024- EASTER 4**

COLLECT

Risen Christ,
faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep:
teach us to hear your voice
and to follow your command,
that all your people may be gathered into one flock,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Psalm 23

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; ♦
therefore can I lack nothing.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures ♦
and leads me beside still waters.
- 3 He shall refresh my soul ♦
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; ♦
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5 You spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me; ♦
you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.
- 6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, ♦
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Acts 4.5-12

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is

"the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;
it has become the cornerstone."

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from John, chapter 10, verses 11-18.

and then at the end:

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel and it is introduced with an Acclamation, as below:

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory.

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory.

I am the light of the world, says the Lord. Whoever follows me has the light of life.

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John, chapter 10, verses 11-18.

Glory to you, O Lord

And then at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

John 10.11-18

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.'

A Reflection from Hannah...

Psalm 23 is possibly the most well-known of all the psalms. It has a place in our collective psyche that is associated with comfort, especially during grief. It's often said at bedsides, funerals and gravesides. And of course, through our Christian lens, it points us to Christ the Good Shepherd- which is the Gospel reading for this week.

Part of its enduring power is that the whole scope of human experience is referenced just in those brief phrases- the green pastures, the still waters, the valley of the shadow of death- and the message is that the Lord is with us and cares for us as we journey through life, whatever it brings. That care doesn't even stop when we go from life, through death and beyond. In the last verse, that transition is hidden at the halfway point- there is just a breath, a pause between 'surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me all the days of my life' and 'I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever'- God in Christ walks with us into eternity.

Though Psalm 23 is usually received as a great source of solace, it's good to be unsteadied. This photograph, by the War Photographer Roger Fenton, is entitled *The Valley of the Shadow of Death*, and was taken in 1855, during the Crimean War (it is the ravine that ran between the British and Russian camps). It shows the aftermath of battle- a barren landscape, filled with cannonballs. It's a reminder that whilst the text of the psalm may trip off the tongue and feel easy to say, when we consider what the valley of the shadow of death might actually look like, we realise that it is a harrowing and unrelenting reality for so many today- one that requires our prayer and reflection.

