West Sussex Area Ministry, United Reformed Church (Billingshurst, Petworth and Pulborough)

Bulletin for Sunday 3rd May 2020

Dear Friends

Good Morning to you all, and I hope it really is a good morning.

Today's reading from John's gospel is a story Jesus told, of a flock of sheep and a shepherd; a safe sheepfold and the gateway into it. Like most, if not all, of Jesus' stories, it can be heard and understood at several levels. Before we get too deep into the metaphors and meanings, perhaps take a bit of time to think of the story through your senses - imagine the safe, solid feel of the rock from which the sheepfold was built, and the rough, splintery wood of the gate. Hear the noisy sounds of the sheep, and the reassuring, familiar voice of the shepherd. Imagine the enthusiasm of the sheep to go out every morning, through the gateway and away to find pasture to graze……..

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Hymn: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty (Rejoice & Sing 74)

Prayer: Praise to the Lord!
As we imagine the security of solid stone walls
we give thanks that God holds us safely…….
Praise to the Lord!
As we imagine the rough strength of weathered wooden gates
we give thanks that Christ leads us where we need to go…..
Praise to the Lord!
As we imagine the generosity of green grass and blue skies
we give thanks that the Spirit frees us to live in God's love….
Praise to the Lord! Amen

Readings: Psalm 23 and John 10: 1-10

Reflection: Right now, safe enclosures may feel claustrophobic, and life may feel less than abundant. Surely abundance implies 'more than sufficient, positively brimming over'; instead of which, we face cancellations and restrictions, loss and fear and grief.
Look again. Jesus talks of the sheep being led both out and in. Psalm 23 describes green pastures and still waters… but also the darkest valley. Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher, not always sure of his next meal or a bed for the night.
And yet… his life - short and difficult by human standards - was filled with love, with hope, with faith. He was so sure of his Father's infinite and unconditional love, that his own life absolutely brimmed over and affected not just his friends and disciples, but the crowds who

followed him too. Abundance of life lies not in riches but in relationships; especially our relationship with the Good Shepherd who loves us, calls us and cares for us - now, as always.

Hymn: Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us (R&S 543)

Prayer: Good Shepherd of so many sheep
we hold before you in prayer:
those in need of shelter, or nourishment, or your guidance;
those exhausted by working, worrying, and caring;
those who are ill; and especially those who are grieving.
We bring to you our own concerns…..
and ask them all in the name of Jesus, the gate of the sheepfold.
Amen

Hymn: In heavenly love abiding (R&S 590)

Go in peace, knowing that Christ offers abundant life;
and may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you and with all those you love
this week and every week. Amen

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Writing worship to be used by you in your own homes is very different from the 'normal' experience of preparing a Sunday service. I can't leave gaps for myself to ad lib in.… and I can't pick the hymns for their words and then just leave our excellent organists to sort out the music and make them work. I know some of you like to find YouTube clips of the hymns online and incorporate them in your worship; and others of you rely on your hymn book to read and perhaps sing along. So I try, mostly, to choose with that in mind - and hopefully the three I've chosen this week have fitted that pattern. But if I had been choosing under other conditions I would have included another one, which speaks to me personally of abundant life. It's Rejoice and Sing number 108, The love of God is broad, like beach and meadow. YouTube versions are rare, but in case anyone else loves it as much as I do, I did find one with the slightly adjusted first line, 'Your love, O God, is broad like beach and meadow'.

Every blessing for the week ahead.

Anne Lewitt