

PARISH NEWSLETTER

St Arvans with Penterry, Itton, Devauden, & Kilgwrrwg

IMPORTANT - PLEASE NOTE

St Arvan's Church is open for worship at 10 a.m. on Sundays. Places must be booked and social distancing maintained in the building and following services. Again, we stress there is absolutely no obligation to attend in person, and that your own safety and health & those of others must remain paramount. Our broadcast services will continue as follows: Sunday Eucharist at 10. a.m. and a reflection & celebration of Night Prayer on Wednesdays at 8 p.m. are live-streamed on the St Arvans Parish Group page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/vicaragecello1/> and are available to watch at any time

Please help to keep us informed of anyone who is in need or is isolated over the next weeks and months, and anyone in need of our prayer and support
Parish Priest (Vicar / Rector):
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25th April 2021 THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER



The Collect

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that we may seek those things which are above, where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **AMEN**

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

The Jewish 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 men by which we must be saved.'

[4; 5 - 12]

Reader/ This is the Word of the Lord
Response / Thanks be to God

Psalm 23

**R/ The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.**

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.

**R/ The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.**

He revives my soul
and guides me along right pathways
for his name's sake.
Though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil; for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

**R/ The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.**

You spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me;
you have anointed my head with oil,
and my cup is running over.
Surely your goodness and mercy
shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
for ever.

**R/ The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.**

A reading from the first letter of St John

[3; 16 - 24]

We know love by this, that the Son of God laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases God. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Reader/ This is the Word of the Lord
Response / Thanks be to God

Gradual Hymn

Alleluia, alleluia!

I am the good shepherd, says the Lord;
I know my own and my own know me.

Alleluia!

The Gospel

The Lord be with you:
And also with you

Listen to the Gospel of Christ according to St. John

R/ Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said to the Pharisees:

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.'

[10, 11 - 18]

This is the Gospel of the Lord
R/ Praise to you, O Christ.



For Your Prayers

That we may hear the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and follow where he leads For vocations to the priesthood of Christ's Church and to all lay ministries. For Christ-like leadership in the Church and for authentic discipleship Those throughout the world suffering from the Coronavirus - for doctors, nurses and all medical staff, all carers, medical scientists and researchers. All who are isolated and alone, those anxious for their health and well-being and those of their loved ones. For those in government throughout the world, that they may make informed, wise and compassionate decisions for the good of all

For the Church:

For the bishops of the Church: John, Archbishop of Wales; Cherry, Bishop of Monmouth, Philip, Episcopal Visitor of the Society of the Holy Cross in Wales, Jonathan, Bishop of Ebbsfleet; Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury. & for all who hold and teach the Catholic faith that comes to us from the Apostles.

All bishops, priests and deacons and all baptised Christians
For the reunion of all Christians: for Pope Francis, for Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, & for the leaders of the Reformed traditions

For the Sick & those in need:

Roy Staples, Ralph Hamilton, Patricia Hamilton; Sylvia; The Revd Helen Rodwell; Amanda Morgan; Kim; Elisabeth; Helen Herbert; Dave; John, Gareth & Barbara Howells

For the Departed:

The recently departed: John Dare; Eirion Hopkins; our own departed relatives & friends, & those whose anniversaries of death fall at this time.

Thought for the Week

"I am like the sick sheep that strays from the rest of the flock. Unless the Good Shepherd takes me on His shoulders and carries me back to His fold, my steps will falter, and in the very effort of rising, my feet will give way."

St Jerome

The Jereboam Interview

We continue our series of extracts from the Jerusalem and Galilee Gazette, an imaginary first-century newspaper. Week by week the correspondent Jereboam interviews various people whose lives have been affected in some way by Jesus Christ and his teaching.

Thanks to the Parish of St Catharine's Chipping Campden & to the author for permission to reproduce 'Jereboam'

Eli

Jereboam: *Lovely to see you again, Eli. You're looking well. How are the sheep?*

Eli: *Oh, they're keeping pretty well, thank you...not quite as old and creaky as I am myself, but then they haven't been around as long.*

Jereboam: *I remember you telling us once about how Jesus was like a shepherd. Maybe today you could explain a bit more about what a shepherd's life involves?*

Eli: *I'll have a go. The first thing to say is that it's a slow life. Everything happens at the sheep's pace. You watch over them as they go about their daily routine of eating, drinking, resting and so on. You supervise and you protect them. Very often you're just there, not doing anything much – at least not in the way people usually mean. Every so often you'll lead them to new pasture land. So, for example, we always go further up into the hills during the warmer months. Wherever you are, you just live with the sheep and check that they're safe, and that they have enough to eat and drink. A lot of the time they're probably not even aware that I'm around. Mind you, they'd probably notice soon enough if I weren't.*

Jereboam: I'm reminded of when my children were young. I'd sometimes sit with them while they were asleep.

Eli: It is a bit like that, I suppose. Even when the sheep are awake, you're not entertaining them or playing with them, as you might with children. As I say, you're just there. Mind you, it's fascinating to watch them and see how they relate to each other. And you're always on your guard – that's another thing. You're always aware of potential dangers. You develop an instinct for such things. It's curious in a way: even with such a steady, slow life, there will still be moments when you suddenly have to act very decisively to preserve the safety of your animals.

Jereboam: Do you have favourites among them?

Eli: I don't know – that's a tricky question. I think I'd say that some of the sheep trust me more than others do, so you build up more of an understanding with those ones. But I'm not sure that I have favourites.

Jereboam: Can you identify them all individually?

Eli: I'd say so, yes: they're all different from each other, when you know what to look for.

Jereboam: And are you glad to be a shepherd?

Eli: It's hard to imagine being anything else, to be honest. It's my life and, yes, I'm happy with it. Of course there are difficulties and so on, but everybody has their fair share of those.

Jereboam: Here's the obvious question now: it had to crop up sooner or later. Why do you think Jesus described himself as a shepherd?

Eli: Well, thinking back to all I've just said, Jesus essentially does the same thing as I do, but with people. Just go back and substitute the word "people" for "sheep". It's all the same, I reckon. Mind you, I've heard some people refer to Jesus as a lamb, which starts confusing me.

Jereboam: Let's leave that bit for another day, if you don't mind...

A Prayer of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

(The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament)

This Week

On the Fourth Sunday of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday we reflect on the Paschal Mystery more deeply. Peter is led before the religious authorities and testifies to his faith in the Resurrection. St John writes in his first letter of the love which should characterise Christ's disciples and in the Gospel Jesus tells us, "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Thursday is the feast day of Saint Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor of the Church. On Saturday, May Day, the Church commemorates St Joseph the Worker.

The first readings at the Eucharist this week continue the story of the growth of the community, through the Acts of the Apostles.

The gospel readings this week are taken from St **John**, chapters 10, 12, 13 and 14 - all emphasizing who Jesus is - from the Father and one with the Father. He has come to bring us light and life. He promises us that he is the gate, the way to life. He assures us that if we make our home in him, he will be in us, and we will thereby be one with Jesus and the Father. He says, "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved." "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish." "Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me."

"From now on I am telling you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe that I AM." "Do not let your

hearts be troubled." "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." "If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it."

Next Sunday: Jesus describes himself as the true vine. We are the branches that are pruned to bear more fruit.

The invitation offered to us is to remain connected with Jesus, that we might make our home in him, and bear much fruit.



A Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

Today's gospel reading comes at a crucial point in the Gospel according to St John. The Lord's words. 'I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me.' come at a time where the opposition to Jesus and the threat to his life from the religious hierarchy are gathering and growing stronger. St John tells us that he has just cured the man born blind, and that the authorities, among them the Pharisees, Sadducees and the high priestly caste – exactly the same people we see the Apostle Peter hauled before in the first reading today - are looking for ways to destroy him. It's also clear that they are beginning to persecute those who follow him. Again, we are told just before this gospel passage that the man born blind has been expelled from the synagogue for telling others about his healing at the hands of the one he has come to believe is the Christ.

So, opinion is divided and polarised, split between those who listen to the teaching of Jesus and those who refuse to hear. There is a very deep division developing

between those who accept Christ and those who reject him. And it's in this context that Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. His illustration here of sheep and the shepherd is about as far from the pastoral image we can have of the British countryside, although there are parallels with sheep farming on the mountains. But James Reebanks it isn't. Firstly, the landscape is very definitely not the one with which we would be familiar here, but is the rocky, semi-barren hill country of the Mediterranean and the middle east. To enter into that landscape at that time is also to recognise the ever-present threat of violence and insecurity, both from wild animals and human thieves and robbers, not to mention the often inhospitable nature of the climate.

The very safety and survival of the sheep depends upon the strength of their bond with the shepherd, the one who continually watches over his flock. If the sheep don't listen to his voice; they will wander off to almost certain disaster. It's not a comfortable image that Jesus very carefully and deliberately calls to mind with the image of the good shepherd, but a troubled, uncertain, dangerous background.

He is the good shepherd, who calls out to his flock in the midst of the troubles and uncertainties of human life.

Here in St John's Gospel as he is entering into ever greater danger he calls on his disciples to follow him in such a way that when the violence and conflict reach their conclusion in his passion and death they are united to him and to one another. And when he says, "*As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep,*" he makes it very clear that this unity is not just an earthly belonging together, but is founded upon the unity of the Holy Trinity. When Jesus tells his disciples that he and the Father are one, he is telling them that the community he is calling them into, the community of the Church, is not just an earthly institution, but a sign of the divine love at work in this world and the next.

Today on this Good Shepherd Sunday, the Gospel reminds us that it is Christ, who calls each one of us, who truly *knows* each one of us, and that his knowing us gives us new life - the Easter life of

Resurrection. On this Sunday when we each reflect upon our own callings to follow the Good Shepherd, what Jesus is saying to us is that through him we hear the voice of God himself, calling us to a share in the overflowing, unlimited love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through him we find the way to life, the life of heaven itself.

And this is where we become aware of the great charge placed upon each and every professing Christian called to witness to the Gospel. The truth of our faith will only be glimpsed by those with whom we wish to share our faith if our lives in some way, even if falteringly and partially - which is probably the most we can hope for much of the time) testify to our belief. They may very well be strange and unexpected ways - we are all different personalities, with different gifts and attributes; there is no 'one size fits all' rigid pattern and model for the way we follow Christ, apart from our sharing in the death and resurrection of the Lord. But the essential proof, if I can put it like that, is when the gifts that are offered to each of us when we turn to Christ in faith are used for the benefit of the whole Christian community, supporting and confirming us in our own journeys to encounter the reality of the Risen Christ in the Scriptures and the sacramental life of the Church.

I suppose what I am saying again is that in the end it's down to us, at least in the sense that we have in the first place to be receptive to what the Lord is asking of us. We have to be open to listen to his voice as he calls us.

But in order for God to communicate his grace to us, we have to be prepared to hang around with our eyes and ears open, if I can put it that way, to be prayerfully receptive and alert, in order for him to give anything to us at all.

And its only through God's grace, freely given and gratefully received, will an understandably sceptical world be able to see that the message of Easter is one of freedom, joy and goodness - that the Holy Spirit, first breathed upon the twelve apostles by Christ after his Resurrection, and later poured out more publicly at Pentecost, is truly at work in the world re-fashioning a new creation out of the old. We - as individual disciples and as part of his Body, the Church - are called to be the new a new humanity, reconciled and forgiven, united to Christ and to one

another, and able by his grace to show the mysterious, irresistible love of God to the world Christ has come to save.

"Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action," St John says to us.

Work in progress, as they say ... +



A Prayer in Spring

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today;
And give us not to think so far away
As the uncertain harvest; keep us here
All simply in the springing of the year.

Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white,
Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;
And make us happy in the happy bees,
The swarm dilating 'round the perfect trees.

And make us happy in the darting bird
That suddenly above the bees is heard,
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,
And off a blossom in mid air stands still.

For this is love and nothing else is love,
To which it is reserved for God above
To sanctify to what far ends He will,
But which it only needs that we fulfill.

Robert Frost