

Worship At Home

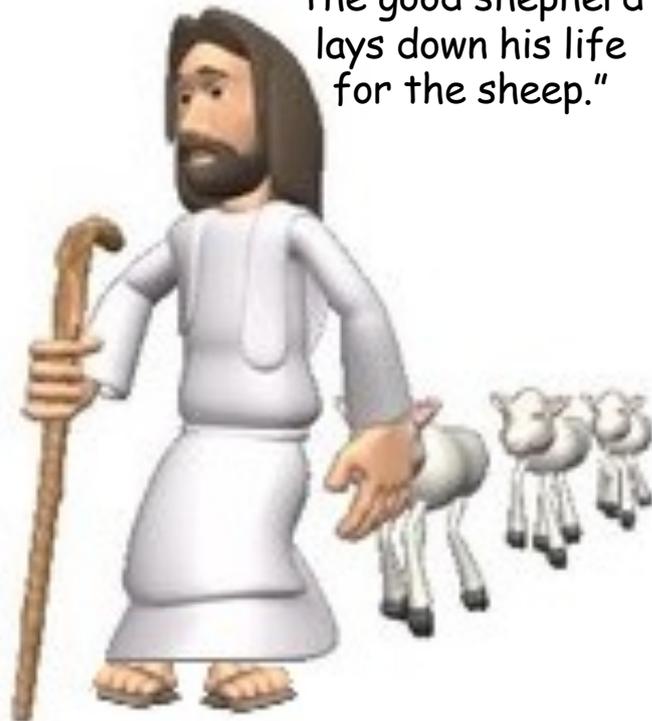
18th April 2021

"I am the Good Shepherd.
The good shepherd
lays down his life
for the sheep."

Lord Jesus

Safe in the knowledge that we are loved,
we come to the Good Shepherd
seeking succour for our souls.
Let not the wolf snatch our thoughts
and scatter them,
for our minds belong to Jesus,
and our hearts are open to him.
Amen.

As a shepherd gathers the flock,
so the love of God has gathered us here today.
Let us celebrate the fullness of life
Jesus has won for us,
and place all that we are,
and all that we long to be,
into his hands and give thanks.



Read John 10.11-18

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - MP1008 The Lord's my shepherd,

1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

2 He guides my ways in righteousness,
and He anoints my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

3 And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
for You are with me, and Your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know.

CCLI 620398

*And I will trust in You alone,
and I will trust in You alone,
for Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

Words adapted by Stuart Townend
Music by Stuart Townend

Let us pray,

Lord, you have created me in your image, formed me carefully from my earliest days,
guided me each step of my life as a loving parent holds the hand of an anxious toddler.
I am precious and wonderful in your sight.

Help me to see myself as you see me. not as other people or the media tell me I should be,
that as part of your family, I am a child of God, in the life of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Lord, we adore you, our Good Shepherd; always there, always watchful. Your fold is the
space you hold for us, where we know we are loved. Although dangers surround us, and in
foolishness we may stray, you have our back. So many sheep, yet you know us all by name.
Lord, we adore you, our Good Shepherd. **Amen**

Reading: Psalm 139

Psalm 139 reminds us of how God is present in every aspect of our lives. Each day, focus on a different aspect of your life in which the psalm says that God is present: in many postures (vv. 2-3), many words (v. 4), many places (vv. 7-10), many moods (vv. 11-12), many stages of life (vv. 13-15), many plans (vv. 16-18), and many difficulties (vv. 19-22).

Come back to this Psalm during the week and use these verses as prayers, topped and tailed each day with verse 1 and verses 23-24, as prayers for a sense of encounter with the living God. At the end of each pray, sit still and wait in God's presence. May God's peace be with you.

Let us pray

Creator God, may every breath we take be for your glory, may every footstep show you as our way, that, trusting in your presence in this world, we may, beyond this life, still be with you where you are alive and reign for ever and ever. The 'good shepherd' is here; we are his beloved sheep. Listen to his voice - he says... I know my sheep. I know you. I know you on the outside, and I cherish what I see. I know you on the inside.

...when you are fearful or anxious, and I long to give you peace.

...when you are vulnerable, and I long to protect you.

...when you are confused, and I long to lead you.

...when you are lost, and I long to find you.

...when you are happy, and I rejoice with you.

I am the 'good shepherd' - come and find pasture. **Amen**

Reflection: The Runaway

Maybe you know the children's story: *The Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown. It begins: Once there was a little bunny who wanted to run away. So, he said to his mother, "I am running away." "If you run away," said his mother, "I will run after you. For you are my little bunny." "If you run after me," said the little bunny, "I will become a fish in a trout stream and I will swim away from you." "If you become a fish in a trout stream," said his mother, "I will become a fisherman and I will fish for you." "If you become a fisherman," said the little bunny, "I will become a rock on the mountain, high above you." "If you become a rock on the mountain high above me," said his mother, "I will be a mountain climber, and I will climb to where you are." (Margaret Wise Brown, *The Runaway Bunny*, Harper & Row, 1942; revised ed. 1972).

The story continues in the same vein with the bunny wanting to run away by various means and his mother saying she would do whatever necessary to find him. At the end the mother speaks of catching him in her arms to hold him fast and hug him.

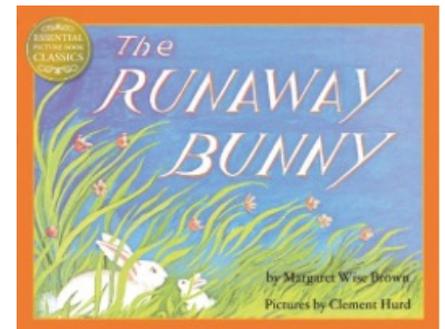
The story continues in the same vein with the bunny wanting to run away by various means and his mother saying she would do whatever necessary to find him. At the end the mother speaks of catching him in her arms to hold him fast and hug him.

What is it that makes that story so compelling? Is it the profound love that healthy parents have for their children? Love that is powerful in all kinds of relationships. Or that the runaway bunny story could be a metaphor for God's love for us.

"I am running away," the little bunny says. "I will run after you, for you are my little bunny," the mother says. The story is as old as humankind. It's the story at the centre of the Bible. It's our story.

Back in Genesis Adam and Eve are hiding behind the bushes in the garden. Hiding from God who created them. Running from love and from relationship with God. Going their own way. God came walking in the garden in the cool of the day and called out to them, "Where are you?" And God found them, out of love for them.

The story of Jonah begins. The word of the Lord came to Jonah and said, "Arise, go east to Nineveh." But Jonah fled from the presence of God. He got on a ship and went west—"away from the presence of God." But God found Jonah, out of love for him.



On his way to the city of Damascus, breathing threats and murder against the disciples of Jesus, he suddenly encountered the risen Christ. Saul was running from God. God found him. It changed his life. The biblical faith tradition says that "running away" and "running after you" is also our story. It is part of the human condition to run from God and to strike out on our own. To be self-sufficient, in control of our own lives. To live apart from the reality of God. The Bible calls it sin. But biblical faith also proclaims that the God who loves us is always there, looking for us, ready to forgive and restore us to relationship with God.

"Where Can I Go?" Psalm 139 gives us an inescapable God. Many today are running from God, to be on their own, to live in the world as if God were not here. The psalm as a prayer for God's help against enemies or persecutors. The point of these verses is that there is nowhere that one can hide or escape from the presence of God. God is ever present and everywhere present. Even though we may "flee" God out of fear, guilt, or doubt, God is still there. That may sound scary, but it is good news. God is there to "lead us" and to "hold us fast." There is great peace and comfort in that. The spirit of this psalm is not fear but trust—the trust that nothing can separate us from the loving presence of God. Wherever we go, whatever happens to us, God is there. Not only is God present, but God also knows us.

God's Gift to Us. Where can I go from your spirit, O God? Where can I flee from your presence? "Nowhere," says the psalmist. God's presence can inspire fear or holy awe, but ultimately it is God's gift to us. I can imagine concluding this sermon with words from the psalm and the closing scene from *The Runaway Bunny*. Exhausted by his mother's relentless promise to run after him and find him, the little bunny says, "Shucks, I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny." God's inescapable presence is a gift to us. We call it grace—the love of God made known to us in Jesus Christ. This is good news.

To know that God is present in our daily work, our careers, family life, and relationships, is a source of strength and comfort, especially during difficult times. God's presence can transform the way we view our work and live our lives. God is in our work and our relationships. We can always look to God for wisdom and guidance. Will you trust Him today? Are you willing to let go and let God?

Let us pray.

As we entwine our hands in prayer, so we entwine our love, our care, our thoughts, our concerns for those whose names and situations we pray for.

As our hands entwine, we see the world is linked, so our prayers are for the world and all its people. O Lord our God you are the shepherd of your sheep; of those who are faithful and stay near, of those who wander and are far off, of those who know you and those who don't, of those who have heard your name and those for whom your name is a mystery yet to be revealed.

Shepherd of the sheep, we bring our prayers... For those who are lost or alone or lonely, struggling through life with no one to guide them, to protect and shelter them, to care for and sustain them; for those without family, without friends, without roots, without homes.

Shepherd of the sheep, we bring our prayers ... For those with no food and no money to buy it, for those who struggle from day to day to feed themselves and their family and who feel they have nowhere to turn and no-one to turn to; praying especially for those in our own country who need to use food banks, that they may find there the support and lifeline they need in these times; praying too for the people of Brazil, especially those in the favelas where over half have barely enough food for one meal a day.

Shepherd of the sheep, we bring our prayers ... For those who follow you in peril of their lives, fearful of arrest and persecution, and thinking at this time especially of those in China and Northern Korea for whom worship is not easy.

Shepherd of the sheep, we bring our prayers ... For peoples of all faith who seek peace and harmony but are challenged with sectarian views and violent extremists, who fear for their lives and their communities and their very existence.

Shepherd of the sheep, we bring our prayers ... For those who struggle with damaged

relationships and domestic violence, those who feel trapped and who see little option but the life they have and the path it has taken; that someone somewhere, will show them a better way, a safety net, a safe house and home and way of life.

Shepherd of the sheep, we bring our prayers ... For those whose lives have been turned upside down by the Covid pandemic, through illness itself, through isolation, fear, hardship, unemployment, debt, overwork, stress or grief; may the world pull together to help and support and vaccinate and may all see and know that until the world is vaccinated none of us are safe.

Shepherd of the sheep ... We pray for the people and situations whose images and pictures and words have imprinted themselves on our lives this last week, we see them now in our minds' eye and for them all in a moment of quiet we pray.

Lord God, **you are the shepherd of your sheep**, bless all those for whom we have prayed and bless us, each one of us as we seek to help those we can, those we encounter as we live out our lives.

May our feet walk for you, may our hands touch for you, may our voices speak for you and may our ears hear the needs of those who speak. **Amen.**

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 555 **Amazing Grace**,

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|---|---|-------------|
| 1 | Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see | CCLI 620398 |
| 2 | Was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed | |
| 3 | Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far
And Grace will lead us home | |
| 4 | The Lord hath promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures. | |
| 5 | When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun. | |

<https://youtu.be/21G3JMYwAIA>

Let us go in peace to love and to serve Jesus, the good shepherd of us all...

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. **Amen.**

Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day.

Rev. Susan Thorburn, sthorburn@churchofscotland.org.uk

If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you. 4