

# The Stratfield Mortimer Benefice of

St Saviour  
Mortimer West End

St Mary and St John  
Stratfield Mortimer

St John the Baptist  
Padworth

St Mary's Church of England School

St John's Church of England School

Diocese of Oxford



*'The Good Shepherd'*

## The Parish Eucharist for The Fourth Sunday of Eastertide 30<sup>th</sup> April 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

Online at Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6931233940>

**Prayer thoughts:** Following a phrase in today's Gospel passage this is often called 'Good Shepherd Sunday' and it's a day when we are asked to reflect on our own 'vocations' and think about how we can help others discern and find strength to live a full and vocational life.

There is a scene towards the end of the film 'Titanic' when the ship is about to sink and Jack and Rose are hanging on to the edge of the stern and Jack says to Rose: 'Don't let go. Whatever happens, don't let go.' There is something profound in knowing that someone wants us to hold on no matter how difficult the situation. As children, of course, we should be able to hold on to our parents and guardians for guidance and protection. And when we become adults perhaps we find a spouse or close friend who will hold us when we stumble and encourage us on when we feel frail and weak.

This Sunday's Gospel passage relates Jesus' 'profound' message that he will always be there as our 'good shepherd' and that through him we can come to see how God encourages us to hold on through the storms and difficulties of life assuring us that nothing can take us from him.

The simple Gospel message is, of course, that everyone who is entrusted with the care of others is a 'shepherd' or 'pastor.' Hence, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, providers, government officials, and caregivers, amongst many others, are all shepherds. And, simply, we become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, as in the example of Christ, by praying for them, by spending our time, talents and blessings for their welfare, and by guarding them from the wolves and dangers of this life. Parents and guardians have, of course, special responsibilities for their children - to give them a good start through sound instruction and training and good example. There is a tradition which emphasises that in order to do this we ourselves need first to be seen to be, as it were, as good members of the fold ourselves. Of course, in a sense our local parish is our 'sheepfold' where we can gather together with our neighbours to find encouragement in the voice of the Good Shepherd and to find together ways to live out his teaching in the place where we live.

This Sunday's Gospel passage offers both a comfort and a challenge. The comforting message is that no one can snatch the sheep away from the Good Shepherd. The challenge is that we should all become good pastors, good shepherds, to those individuals and communities entrusted to our care.

A distinguished actor was a guest at a gathering for young people and the young asked the actor to recite excerpts from various literary masterpieces. He obliged and did so brilliantly. Then an elderly pastor asked the actor to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. The actor agreed on condition that she would return the favour. The actor's recitation was brilliant and the young people applauded. The elderly pastor's recitation was faltering and weak, but when she finished a number of people found their eyes had welled up - including the actor. At last the actor broke the silence saying, 'I know the Psalm. The pastor knows the Shepherd.'

God bless, Paul

# The Eucharist for the Fourth Sunday of Eastertide

A very warm welcome as we gather for our Parish's celebration of the Sunday Eucharist during the Fifty Days of Eastertide.

An induction loop is provided. To use, please turn your hearing aid to T.

Gluten free wafers are available for those who need them. Please inform one of the vergers who will pass the information on to the clergy.

*Online:* If you are not able to come to St John's you are warmly invited to share in the Parish's Sunday Eucharist online. And may God bless and renew us as we join together to worship. **Thank you.**

*THIS 'HOLY MEMORIAL' is known by various names: 1) 'The Eucharist' - which means 'Thanksgiving' - because Jesus offered himself in love; 2) 'The Lord's Supper' - or 'Breaking of the Bread' - because we celebrate it as a shared meal; 3) 'Holy Communion,' - because we become one with Christ by receiving him; and 4) 'Holy Mass' - holy sending - because it gives us a mission: to go in peace to serve the Lord.*

*The 'objectives' of the Eucharist: The community gathers for the public celebration of the Eucharist in order to worship God; ask his forgiveness for sins; thank him for blessings received; listen to his voice in the Scriptures; present the needs of the world and our own needs too; offer our lives to him and his loving service; gain spiritual nourishment and recharge our weakened spiritual batteries by sharing life with him in Holy Communion. The simple structure of the Eucharistic celebration is organized around achieving these goals.*

## THE GATHERING SONG

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
pure unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy grace receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above;  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.

## THE GATHERING

Priest           + In the name of God - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
All                Amen.

*The priest may introduce the Eucharist.*

## THE GREETING - Words of Welcome and Introduction

*The greeting proclaims the presence of the Lord with us.*

*The Penitential Rite, the Gloria and the Opening Prayer follow. The purpose of these preliminary rites is to help the people, gathered for the celebration of the Eucharist, to join with each other as a worshipping community, and to prepare to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist - the Great Thanksgiving.*

All                Alleluia. Christ is risen.  
                    **He is risen indeed.**

All                The Lord be with you.  
                    **And also with you.**

## THE PRAYERS OF PENITENCE

*The Invitation to Confession - we call to mind our sins that we may repent of them / turn from them and ask forgiveness of God and each other.*

Priest           My brothers and sisters, as we come together as God's family  
                    to celebrate the Easter mysteries,  
                    let us ask with confidence the Father's forgiveness for our sins,  
                    for he is full of gentleness and compassion.

*A pause for quiet reflection follows.*

**All** I confess to almighty God,  
and to you, my brothers and sisters,  
that I have sinned through my own fault,  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do.

*The Absolution*

+ Almighty God, have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

**All** Amen.

## **THE GLORIA**

*Gloria, gloria, in excelsis Deo.*

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

## **THE COLLECT**

Priest Let us pray that the risen Christ will raise us up and renew our lives.

*Together we spend a few moments in silence, realising, and giving thanks, that we are in the presence of God our Father to whom we make our prayers. The prayer 'collects' our thoughts.*

Risen Christ, faithful shepherd of your Father's people:  
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

**All** Amen.

## **THE LITURGY OF THE WORD**

*The Liturgy of the Word consists of readings from the scriptures; a sermon/homily, which expounds the readings; the Profession of Faith, which is the Creed of God's people; and the Prayer of the Faithful or General Intercessions in which the people of God intercede for all humankind and all creation.*

*In the Liturgy of the Word God speaks to us of redemption and salvation and nourishes us with his 'word.' We are not only listening to past history. The God who speaks to Israel and to the early Church speaks to us today through the power of the Holy Spirit working within us as we listen to him and as he reveals the pattern for our lives. 'The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double edged sword but more finely...it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts'(The Letter to the Hebrews 4:12).*

*Either two or three READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE follow, the last of which is the Gospel.*

**THE FIRST READING: ACTS 2: 42 - 47.** - Read by Elizabeth Porter.

Reader A reading from Acts of the Apostles.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the praye

*Life among the believers.*

Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

*At the end of the reading:*

Reader This is the word of the Lord.

**All** Thanks be to God.

Cantor Laudate Dominum, Laudate Dominum,  
Omnes gentes, alleluia!

*Psalm 117 - The Ecumenical Community of Taizé*

**All**                **Laudate Dominum, Laudate Dominum,  
Omnes gentes, alleluia!**

*Now we hear the Gospel (the Good News) and acknowledge that we are his people and called to be part of his mission to the world inasmuch as we share his message and his life with faith, hope and love.*

### **THE GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

**Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.**

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

*John 10: 14*

**Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.**

*Now we hear the Gospel (the Good News) and acknowledge that we are his people and called to be part of his mission to the world inasmuch as we share his message and his life with faith, hope and love.*

### **THE GOSPEL READING - ST JOHN'S GOSPEL 10: 1 - 10.**

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

**All**                **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

The Lord be with you.

**All**                **And also with you .**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St John.

**All**                **Glory to you, O Lord.**

*Context: Pharisees had accused Jesus of breaking the rules in healing a blind man on the Sabbath. His response was that he was not like the hired hands which collected their dues but didn't really care for the sheep and abandoned them in their time of need. Instead, he was the Good Shepherd.*

Jesus said: 'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a brigand. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.'

Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they failed to understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All who came before me are thieves and brigands, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be safe and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it to the full.'

*At the end of the Gospel:*

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**All**                **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

**All**                **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

### **THE SERMON**

*We are a Eucharistic community - united around word and sacrament. Through the readings God has spoken to his people of his redeeming love and of the nourishment which his Spirit gives. The sermon reflects on our readings and relates them to our Eucharistic celebration and to our ordinary daily life.*

*After the sermon there may be a short period of silent reflection.*

### **THE PROFESSION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH - THE CREED**

*We make the profession of faith in response to the word of God written in the Gospels and spoken in the sermon. We testify that God is our Father who gives us new life through his Son and who calls us together in the power of his Spirit to be a Eucharistic people, a 'thanksgiving people', a living community of his abiding self-giving love.*

**All**                **We believe and trust in God the Father who made the world.**

**We believe and trust in his Son, Jesus Christ, who redeemed the world.**

**We believe and trust in the Holy Spirit who gives life to the people of God. Amen**

### **THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL OR GENERAL INTERCESSION**

*We are invited to pray for all people and for all creation and for the needs of the Church's mission in bringing Christ's Gospel to the world. Through baptism we have been made one with Christ, our great high priest, and we share in his prayer before the Father for the needs of the Church's mission to the world and for of people. Our prayer flows from our listening to the Gospel and sermon by which we have been made more aware of our Christian commitment.*

*This Prayer of the Faithful, or General Intercession, is announced and consists of a series of intercessions; we pray for the universal Church and its mission and for our bishop and for our benefice - our parishes and our two Church schools; for the world, for our Queen and country, for our local communities, families and friends; for the sick and suffering and for all in pain; and we remember those who have died. And in communion with Mary, St John the Evangelist, St John the Baptist and all the Saints of God we entrust one another and all people and all creation to God's saving love.*

Priest: My brothers and sisters, let us pray with Easter joy to our heavenly Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in union with the risen Christ.

*The deacon or minister continues:*

Heavenly Father, shed the light of the risen Christ upon our world.

We pray for the Church and for its ministry and mission: for Justin our Archbishop, Stephen Archbishop of York, Steven our Bishop and Olivia our area Bishop, and for our parishes and our schools of St Mary's and St John's; and that we and all Christian people may bear witness with great confidence to the resurrection.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, bless and guide Charles our King, our Government, our District and Village Councils and all in authority that they may govern with justice and wisdom and seek the common good...

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, bless our families and friends and all those given us to care for... May our love for one another witness to the grace and truth of the risen Christ.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we pray to you for all who are suffering today whether in body, mind or spirit... May the love of the risen Christ bring comfort and the hope of the resurrection bring peace.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we remember before you all who have gone before us... May we be united for ever in the joy of heaven.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, in communion with the Blessed Mother, St John the Evangelist, St John the Baptist and all your saints, we commend all creation to your unfailing love.

Priest Merciful Father,  
All **Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

## **THE LITURGY OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST**

*At the Last Supper Christ 'took some bread and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying "This is my body which will be given for you; do this in remembrance of me". He did the same with the cup...' (Luke 22:19-20). The Church, joyfully obedient to the Lord's command, celebrates the Eucharist taking care that our 'liturgy' corresponds to the words and actions of Christ: 1) Taking bread and wine - we take our own gifts to the Altar, such as our time and talents and our money for the poor and for ministry. 2) Giving thanks (the meaning of the word Eucharist) - in the Eucharistic Prayer the priest, in the name of us all, says the great hymn of our thanksgiving to God for the whole work of salvation, in which the offerings become the Body and Blood of Christ. 3) The breaking of the one bread is a sign of the unity of the faithful - a sign of the unity which comes through sharing in Christ. 4) And in Holy Communion we receive Christ. In this way, Sunday by Sunday and day by day, the Church tries to carry out what the Lord asked his disciples to do in remembrance of him.*

## **THE PEACE**

*We acknowledge and give thanks for our unity with one another in Jesus Christ our Lord, which his death and resurrection have brought to us. He is the peace between us. The sign of peace echoes Christ's own resurrection greeting to his disciples. Before we share in the same bread we express our love for one another in Christ and pray for peace and unity (cf Luke 1.78,79).*

Priest The Risen Christ came and stood among his disciples  
and said, 'Peace be with you.'  
Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia.  
The peace of the Lord be always with you.

All **And also with you.**

## **THE PRESENTATION AND PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS**

*The peoples' gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar. The offerings of money is made and promised to support the wider ministry and work of the Church. Taking the Gifts: We give thanks to God for the gifts in the following words.*

### **BREAD**

Priest Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer,  
which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.

All **Blessed be God for ever.**

## **WINE**

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become for us the cup of salvation.

**All** **Blessed be God for ever.**

## **OUR TIME, TALENTS AND TREASURE/MONEY**

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have the gifts of our time, talents and money to offer. May our offerings of our gifts be a sincere sign of our gratitude and our dedication to your service.

**All** **Blessed be God for ever.**

*The priest prays quietly: Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble, contrite and thankful hearts.  
The priest washes hands as an expression of the desire for inward purification, praying quietly: Lord, wash away my iniquity; cleanse me from my sin.*

## **PRAYER OVER THE GIFTS**

Priest Pray my brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father.

**All** **May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good, and the good of all his Church.**

Priest Amen.

Heavenly Father, eternal shepherd of your people, guide the flock redeemed by the love of Christ and lead us to the promised land.

**All** **Amen.**

## **THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER**

*The Eucharistic Prayer is the centre and high point of the whole Christian celebration. This great prayer of praise and thanksgiving proclaims the wonderful works of God and through it we join ourselves with Christ in praise and thanksgiving to God the Father and in offering ourselves to him in union with Christ's self-offering on the cross. We express our share in the prayer, which is said on behalf of all the people, by listening inwardly and joining in the acclamations (joyful shouts or songs) and the Sanctus (the Holy, Holy, Holy which concludes the preface), the memorial acclamation and the great 'Amen' which concludes our Eucharistic Prayer.*

Priest The Lord be with you.

**All** **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**All** **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All** **It is right to give thanks and praise.**

*In the Preface we praise God for his mighty acts:*

Heavenly Father, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks because through Christ you have delivered us from the bonds of fear and pride and sin into the glorious liberty of the people of God.

And so, we join with all the company of heaven to proclaim:

**All** **Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

*We pray to the Father for the sending down of the Holy Spirit and recall the Lord's Supper.*

Priest We thank you, loving Father, because when we turned away you sent to us your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

He gave his life for us upon the cross. He shows us now the way to live.

Send your Holy Spirit that these gifts of bread and wine may be for us Christ's body and his blood.

On the night before he died, when darkness had fallen, Jesus took bread. He gave thanks, broke it, and shared it with his disciples, saying:

'This is my body, given for you. Do this to remember me.'

After they had eaten he took the cup of wine, gave thanks, and shared it with his disciples, saying:

‘This is my blood, poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this to remember me.’

So, Father, with this bread and this cup we celebrate his love, his death, his risen life.

As you feed us with these gifts, send your Holy Spirit upon us and change us more and more to be like Jesus our Saviour.

Help us, Father, to love one another, as we look forward to that day when suffering is ended and all creation is gathered in your loving arms.

And now with Mary, the Blessed Mother of our Lord, St John the Evangelist, St John the Baptist, and all your saints, we give you glory, through Jesus Christ and in the strength of your Holy Spirit, today and for ever.

**All**                    **Amen.**

## **HOLY COMMUNION**

*The communion rite lays strong emphasis on peace, unity and our prayer for forgiveness. We come together to the Lord's table in accordance with the Lord's command, 'Take, eat... take, drink', as a community bound together by the love of God manifest in Christ. We can all be confident in Christ's mercy as we respond to his call to come to his table. Our communal recitation of the Lord's Prayer - the prayer he taught us - prepares us for Holy Communion with our Lord.*

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Priest                As our Saviour taught us, so we pray.

**All**                    **Our Father, who art in heaven,**  
**hallowed be thy name;**  
**thy kingdom come;**  
**thy will be done;**  
**on earth as it is in heaven.**  
**Give us this day our daily bread.**  
**And forgive us our trespasses,**  
**as we forgive those who trespass against us.**  
**And lead us not into temptation;**  
**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

## **THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD**

*The priest takes the host and breaks it over the cup, praying quietly: 'May this mingling of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.' 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' (1 Corinthians 10:17)*

*Christ's gesture of breaking bread with his disciples at the Last Supper gave the Eucharist the name of the 'breaking of bread.'. This gesture signifies that we who share one bread and one cup are made one. The breaking of the Eucharistic bread becomes a sign of unity and charity as the one bread is distributed to the family of God's people.*

Priest                We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All**                    **Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread.**

*The priest prepares quietly for Holy Communion. We may all join quietly in this prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit your death brought life to the world. By your holy body and blood free me from all my sins and from every evil. Keep me faithful to your teaching, and never let me be parted from you. Amen.*

## **PREPARATION FOR HOLY COMMUNION**

Priest                Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.                    *cf. John 1: 29*

Blessed are those who are called to his supper.

**All**                    **Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word, and I shall be healed.**

*The sign of communion is more complete when given under both 'kinds' since then the sign of the eucharistic meal appears more clearly. However, we live in exceptional times when communion may be given in one 'kind.'*

*The priest takes the host, raises it a little and shows it saying: The Body of Christ. And the same with the cup saying: The Blood of Christ. When receiving Holy Communion the response and assent to Christ is:*

**+ Amen.**

**DURING HOLY COMMUNION** *The Choir may sing hymns, anthems and songs.*

**The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;  
he makes me down to lie  
in pastures green; he leadeth me  
the quiet waters by.**

**My soul he doth restore again,  
and me to walk doth make  
within the paths of righteousness,  
e'en for his own name's sake.**

**Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,  
yet will I fear none ill;  
for thou art with me, and thy rod  
and staff me comfort still.**

**My table thou hast furnished  
in presence of my foes;  
my head thou dost with oil anoint,  
and my cup overflows.**

**Goodness and mercy all my life  
shall surely follow me;  
and in God's house for evermore  
my dwelling-place shall be.**

**PRAYER AFTER HOLY COMMUNION**

Priest Let us pray.

*The priest invites us all to pray that the Holy Eucharist will have its effect in transforming our lives and bring us all to God's kingdom. We pray together silently for a while before the Post Communion prayer.*

Priest Merciful Father, you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd,  
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:  
keep us always under his protection, and give us grace to follow in his steps;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

**THE NOTICES FOR THE COMMUNITY ARE GIVEN.**

**THE CONCLUDING RITE**

Priest Alleluia, Christ is risen.

All **He is risen indeed, Alleluia.**

Priest The Lord be with you.

All **And also with you.**

**THE BLESSING**

Priest God the Father, by whose love Christ was raised from the dead,  
open to you the gates of everlasting life.

All **Amen.**

Priest God the Son, who in bursting the grave has won a glorious victory,  
give you joy as you share the Easter faith.

All **Amen.**

Priest God the Holy Spirit, whom the risen Lord breathed into his disciples,  
empower you and fill you with Christ's peace.

All **Amen.**



Priest           + And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
                          be among you and remain with you always.

All                **Amen.**

                      Go in the peace of Christ, Alleluia, Alleluia.

All                **Thanks be to God, Alleluia, Alleluia.**

## **HYMN**

*'Amazing grace given to a lost sheep...'*

*John Newton was only ten when his mother died and he went to sea with his English sea captain father. At 17 he rebelled against his father, left his ship and began living a wild life. Eventually John took a job on a cargo ship that carried slaves from Africa to America. He was promoted rapidly and soon became captain. One night a violent storm blew up and everyone on board was filled with panic and Newton did something he had not done since leaving his father's ship - he prayed. Thereafter, he quit the slave trade and began studying for ordination. And, of course, he wrote the hymn he called '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.'*

**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.**

**'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,**

**and grace my fears relieved;**

**how precious did that grace appear**

**the hour I first believed!**

**Through many dangers, toils and snares**

**I have already come:**

**'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,**

**And grace will lead me home.**

**Please donate regularly to support the Church's mission and work. *The church here needs your help in order to serve our villages, our diocese, our nation and our world in the future. Our doors have been closed due to Covid 19 and with no regular Government or Church of England funding we have lost significant income. Please see the website to see how to give efficiently. Thank you.***

NOTE. The Jewish people were familiar with imagery which described God as 'the Good Shepherd.' For example, in Genesis 49:24 we read how Joseph was saved 'By the power of the mighty one...by the Shepherd...the God of your father ...' And the image was taken up and used by Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Zechariah, and, of course, by the psalmist as in Psalm 23 - 'The Lord is my Shepherd; nothing shall I want.' - and in Psalm 95 - 'He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.' And also Psalms 77:20; 79:13 and 97:7. And Isaiah 40: 11 takes it up: 'Like a shepherd, he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.' And Ezekiel 34:15-16 foretells what the Messiah will do as Good Shepherd: 'I myself will tend my sheep ...I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.' In short, the message of the scriptures seems to be that God is the ultimate shepherd of the people - providing guidance, sustenance, and protection (Ps 23) - and he intends that those who would be their servant-leaders should be good shepherds too.

And the image of the Good Shepherd is taken up in the New Testament where the word was synonymous for selfless love, sincerity, commitment, and sacrificial service. Of course, as far as John the Gospel writer is concerned, when Jesus selects it to denote his own life and mission this says a great deal about himself e.g. (Mt 2:6, 9:36, 18:12-14, 26:31; Mk 6:34, 14:27; Lk 12:32, 15:4; I Pt 2:25, 5:2-4; Heb 13:20).

In first century Palestine at the end of the day the shepherds would bring their sheep down from the hills to protect them through the night from wolves and mountain lions. The shepherds would gather their sheep together in large pens or sheepfolds which had boundary walls. The door or gateway was about two feet wide, a narrow space, outside of which a wood fire was lit. The shepherd would sleep in the small opening of the wall facing the burning fire with club and staff to hand to fight off predators. Thus, literally and actually, the shepherd himself was the door.

We see how in this Gospel parable Jesus compares himself to the Shepherd and to the Gate. The first title represents his 'ownership' because the shepherd is the 'true owner' of the sheep. The second title represents his servant-leadership. Jesus is the gate - the only way in or out. By identifying himself with the sheep-gate Jesus is assuring us that whoever enters the pen by him will be cared for and protected.

