

Good Shepherd Sunday 4th Sunday of Easter

April 26th St Albans Upper Ventnor

It's a strange time we are living through – isolation & safe distancing. The government's key responsibility is to keep its population safe, and to care for the people. We have been encouraged to become more community minded, & look out for neighbours, as well as relations. The NHS seeks to treat our ills (not only Covid 19) and the front line workers put their lives at risk for us, many sacrificing their lives. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, sacrificed his life to open heaven to all who accept him as their Saviour.

The shepherds of Palestine on the rugged hill-country put their lives on the line for the sheep they loved. They knew each one by name. It was rough and stony ground. Grass and water were hard to find. There were ravines and crags in which silly sheep and lambs could be lost. But shepherds risked their lives to save their lost sheep. Dangers faced the wandering sheep on every side - wild animals and wolves, as well as thieves. The shepherd was brave and caring, continually watchful, and willing to give his life for his sheep. He called them in a special language as he led his sheep and lambs to pasture and water, (no sheep dogs to round them up). His sling and his staff (like a cudgel) hung from his belt to defend his flock.

At eventide he placed his rod, (like a shepherd's crook) across the entrance to the sheep fold so that he could examine each creature for injuries and do all he could to help the healing process. Then the shepherd lay across the entrance to the roughly made sheep pen to protect the flock through the night. He himself was the gate or door. The shepherd was brave and caring, continually watchful, and willing to give his life for his sheep.

No wonder in the Old Testament God himself is pictured as 'the Good Shepherd' and the people as his flock, by prophets like Isaiah, and in many of the psalms like Psalm 23. The Jews gave this title to their king, and applied it to God's Anointed One, the Messiah, in the line of King David. In the Gospels, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. He knows his sheep by name, seeks the lost sheep, and cares for them, even being the door or gate of the sheep fold. To us who believe, we can enjoy fullness of life & safe rest at night. As St Peter wrote in one of his letters, Jesus, who is God incarnate, is 'the great shepherd and overseer of our souls.'

We acknowledge God's provision of our food when we say the grace at meals. When we pray for those who are sick we talk to God as the healer. When we commit ourselves to his care as we lie down to sleep, we know we rest in him, who is our shepherd and Saviour.

Jenny Hopkins-Holder