

has in mind when he says: *I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*

If Jesus was giving a similar talk to his followers today he might use another image of caring; that of the parent, because it is the image of care in our culture with which we are most familiar. The good parent, whether mother or father, will do all they can, using all their resources, to enable their child to be safe and have the best gateway into life that they could have. We have all heard of parents who have been willing to endure all kinds of suffering on behalf of their children; and in some in give extreme cases even their lives. But now, in this time of plague, Jesus might use another image of caring, that of a nurse, care worker or doctor, caring for those suffering from the Coronavirus. There have been some very moving stories of how some have taken great risk, some even losing their own lives. Some of those NHS workers who are Christians may see Jesus the Good Shepherd as their example in their service to humanity.

The encouragement we take from Jesus as the Gate for the Sheep, the Good Shepherd, is that he is the ultimate care worker, he is the perfect parent. He is the absolute definition of what it means to truly and sacrificially care. Jesus will never leave our side, no matter how isolated we may feel or lost, or endangered. If you want to encourage yourself today say Jesus's words about his coming that they might have life to the full in this way: *Jesus says to me I have come so that you might have life to the full.* Wherever we are we are never beyond his care.

**DO MAKE USE OF OUR WEBSITE** We do have a website for THE STODDEN CHURCHES. If you are looking for service information you will find it there. Please make use of it, and it is somewhere you can suggest people look for information who are new to the area or the congregation

**VIRTUAL COLLECTION PLATE:** If you wish to be able to give electronically here are the Stodden Churches bank detail: Stodden account number 10842168 sort code 20-74-81

**VIRTUAL CHURCH:** If you want to "virtual worship" users can watch live streams of services from a range of churches and the Church of England will be improving [AChurchNearYou.com](http://AChurchNearYou.com) in the days ahead to make this clearer. There is **Prayer for the day** - each day the Church of England publishes **audio and text of the Prayer for the Day**. There is the BBC daily service and Sunday worship also available on BBC Sounds.

## **The Stodden Churches**

### **Prayers and Readings for the week beginning Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020 the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

***Our Vision Statement: As the Stodden Churches we seek to move forward together in love and service, sharing the good news of Christ with our neighbours***

**From the Stodden Villages lease remember in your prayers :** Teresa Allan, Pauline McManus, Steve Lemming, Trish Sizer, Frances Bratcher, Andy Langley, Andrew Seabrook, Rosemary Morgan, Anne Hauxwell. *If someone would like a visit or a prayer tell Stephen the Rector (709740)*

#### **This week's Psalm: 23**

- The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing.
- 2 **He shall feed me in a green pasture:  
and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.**
- 3 He shall convert my soul: and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake.
- 4 **Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:  
for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff comfort me.**
- 5 Thou shalt prepare a table before me, against them that trouble me: thou hast anointed my head with oil and my cup shall be full.
- 6 **But thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me,  
all the days of my life:  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.**

**The Collect for this week:** Risen Christ, faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep: 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. Amen

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Reading: 1 Peter 1:19-end:** 19For it is to your credit if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. 20If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, where is the credit in that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. 21For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 22 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' 23When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: John 10:1-10:** 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 bandit. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. <sup>7</sup> So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. <sup>11</sup> 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

**Reflection:** One of the most familiar images Jesus used to describe himself to his followers was that of the "Good Shepherd". It is an image that has inspired composers and hymn-writers down the years and just to mention a few: *Loving Shepherd of thy sheep*, *The King of love my shepherd is*, and of course *The Lord's my Shepherd*. When Jesus describes the good shepherd in the first few verse of John 10 he highlights the caring, even loving, priority of this shepherd; *The sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out...his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

It is the care in the shepherd's voice that is important in that thumb-nail description of a shepherd, for Jesus makes it clear that a stranger's voice will frighten the sheep away. The reason the sheep will run is because they have not come to know that voice and trust it, the stranger's voice is an alien voice and they cannot hear the cadences of care that gives the sheep reassurance and fosters their trust.

Jesus goes on to describe himself as the gate for the sheep. We might think that Jesus would have followed his portrayal of the key quality of being shepherd as a carer, one who practically loves by sustaining and protecting, by then saying that he is The Good Shepherd, but he does not. Rather Jesus says *I am the gate for the sheep*, but this is not a slip of the tongue. I must admit I was always puzzled by Jesus talking about himself as a gate of the sheepfold until I went to Israel and visited a place called Tantur, which was a place where they had used archaeology to reconstruct Jewish life in Judea in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. There I saw a sheepfold made of stones with lots of spiky branches on top to keep the wolves out, with a gap where the door or gate should be. It was explained to us that the Shepherd would lie across the gateway to protect his sheep; he would know if a sheep tried to escape out into the dangerous wild, and he would be there to defend them from wolves trying to get into kill them. So by saying he is the "Gate for the sheep" Jesus is saying the same as he says explicitly a few verses later in v.11 *I am the good shepherd*.

This idea of the Shepherd as a carer; one who practically loves by sustaining and protecting those in his care, is obviously very important to how Jesus understands himself and his purpose. He describes himself as a shepherd twice in very quick succession, and by using the "gate" image of a shepherd protecting his flock, putting himself in harm's way to keep them safe, protecting their lives, he is clearly seeing this shepherding, caring, role as key to his mission.

Jesus lived in a mainly rural culture where shepherds and sheep were a regular feature of people's lives, and, of course, the great Jewish hero King David had been a shepherd. So it is an image which Jesus' listeners would have been very familiar with. In Jesus' day, and even further back, in the days of David, a shepherd would take on the wolves and thieves to protect his sheep and even give his life if he was totally committed to their care. Jesus says of the Good Shepherd; *the good shepherd lays down his life for sheep*. To be willing to give your life in the care of others, for whom you have responsibility, is the ultimate in care; this is sustaining life and protecting life by being willing to lay down one's life. Jesus did this when he did lay down his life on the Cross so that we might have life, eternal life, real life with God. It is that great act of care and its fruit in our lives that Jesus