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EASTER 4B

21st April 2024

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

This prayer comes with some movements. You are invited to follow the words with your body as you read, if it helps.

You need your hands and the prayer can be offered seated or standing. The movements can of course be imagined if that is what works well for you.

Loving God,

I come to worship you this day – ready to notice your presence.

As I place my hands against my chest, I am reminded to love you with all my heart and I share with you in the silence my feelings as I meet with you.

As I place my hands on my tummy, I recognise that I am invited to love you with my soul.

And I come to you again thinking about your call on my life – what drives me and gives me purpose for your work.

I take a moment to roll my hands into balls and think of how I apply all my strength and resolve as I approach you with love.

Finally, as I put a hand on my head, I give thanks for all I know, all I can learn and all I can share. My mind is yours, O Lord.

Loving God, as I worship this day, I come loving you with all my heart and soul and strength and mind, just as the ancients did before and generations will to come.

Amen

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are most familiar or comfortable.

Reading: John 10:11-18 - [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the reading

What do you think Jesus meant by 'I am the Good Shepherd'?

The metaphor of the Good Shepherd would have been understood by Jesus' original hearers, not least because theirs was a traditional farming culture. It's a context far removed from the world many of us in the UK live - mainly in towns and cities, mainly getting our food through supermarkets. The story that defines the Jewish audience Jesus was addressing begins with Old Testament stories of people keeping sheep and other livestock: Joseph's brothers were taking care of their father's flock when Jacob sent him to find them; David was a shepherd and Psalm 23 is a theological reflection upon God as the shepherd. The prophet Amos was also a shepherd and several of the Jewish festivals celebrate the seasons of the agricultural year.

It is also a comment on leadership - and when Jesus says this famous line, he knows that some of the Pharisees and religious leaders are listening in too. Are they being criticised by this presentation of another kind of leader? As Richard Rohr says: 'the best criticism of the

bad is the practice of the better.' Is that what the Jewish leaders become so challenged and upset by Jesus?

The Pharisees could well have been deeply offended and enraged by the teaching of this upstart teacher and healer. Some of his more sympathetic auditors may have thought about their heritage and perhaps the more learned ones among them were trying to recall the scriptural references for Jesus' teaching.

In the Gospel of John, just before the passage we have read today, there is the Parable of the Shepherd that reveals further information about shepherding in 1st century Palestine (John 10.1-6). This was a physically and mentally demanding role. They were often alone in bleak, isolated settings. To prevent themselves from falling asleep and leaving their sheep unguarded, shepherds would physically act as the doors to the sheepfold so that the sheep would have to step on them in order to escape. Acting as living gates to the fold - standing guard, literally.

Whilst identifying himself as the Good Shepherd, Jesus pledges his willingness to die for the sheep. Whereas a hired man, when put to the test might run from danger, Jesus would remain. Jesus, having identified the contrast between the hired man and the good shepherd, goes beyond the confines of the imagery of his parable to warn of his death, giving a glimpse of the role that only he could play, for only he would willingly lay down his life to show the possibility for new life, for new possibility, for a fresh start. For resurrection.

What does being 'the Good Shepherd' mean to you? How can you demonstrate 'good shepherd' tendencies in the roles and responsibilities you have in your life?

Responding in prayer

Heavenly Father and Mother, I come to you in prayer today, simply asking that I may grow in understanding of my reliance upon and responsibility for the natural world of which each of us are called to be stewards but from which contemporary life may feel distanced.

Heavenly Creator and Christ, I come to you in prayer today for shepherd leaders: both the leaders of nations, that they may promote the common good rather than seeking wealth or self-aggrandisement. For those who become leaders in more local contexts that they will serve sacrificially for the well-being of all.

Heavenly Spirit at the heart of all things, I come to you in prayer, in a world of plenty, for those affected by poverty in this land and worldwide. For all who are struggling to make ends meet as prices rise and their resources dwindle. For those increasingly reliant on foodbanks, debt crisis counselling, night shelters and humanitarian charities.

And, lastly, for myself...and in stillness, hear the invitation to bring your own prayers.

[Stillness]

O God, my God, **hear** my prayer.

Amen.

Responding in song:

Listen to, or sing along with one or both of these hymns, using this as an opportunity to reflect on how you will respond to all you have thought, read about or heard from God today.

350 STF – I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship - [YouTube](#)

503 STF – Love divine, all loves excelling - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

May you know the Christ at work in your life – may you come to see the Spirit flowing through you, may you feel the transformative love at work in your life.

And may the grace and peace of God go before you, within you, around you and through you,

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week Ahead

Monday 22nd April

The Methodist Church in Britain is partners with the church in Taiwan (a partnership managed by the Global Relationships Team), and they have requested prayer for The Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology in light of the recent earthquake in the region. The Centre itself has not been affected by the earthquake, but they invite us to join them in prayer for all who have, and in their work with those who have been injured or bereaved, and with the recovery and rebuilding work that must be done.

Tuesday 23rd April

- Look at your hands, perhaps hold them open before you for a moment.
- How have you used your hands today? Has it been to make the world a better place, or not?
- How could you use your hands for the rest of this day, and this week, to plant seeds of hope – literal or metaphorical?
- Pray for the courage to be involved in life-giving wherever you can.

Wednesday 24th April

Later this year it is the World Methodist Conference in Gothenburg, Sweden. The first of a series of letters about the Conference has just been released here: https://issuu.com/wmcouncil/docs/april_2024_ffl_pdf

You may wish to use the materials in the letter for prayer, and consider whether you could be in Gothenburg, or mark the dates for future prayer points. As an option to travel with a group, All We Can is running a pilgrimage to Gothenburg, find out more here: <https://www.allwecan.org.uk/event/worldmethodistconference>

Thursday 25th April

- Gracious God, today I pray for all those who work in medicine and medical care. For ambulance drivers, doctors, nurses, other hospital staff, for people working on research and in labs, for administrators and medics everywhere. As they seek to heal, to mend, to care for, and relieve suffering, May they know something of your grace in their lives, Amen.

Friday 26th April

- Seek stillness today. As often as you can, and for as long as you can, try to hold moments of silent prayer. Do not try to say any words, or hear anything in particular. Just hold the stillness. If it helps you to focus on your breathing, or a particular mantra, do that, otherwise, just still your mind and be present.
- Be still and know that I am God.

Saturday 27th April

God of all grace and wisdom,

Show me what is mine to do this day - help me to see clearly where it is my place to step forward, and where it is appropriate for me to step back.

Teach me to follow in your footsteps as a Good Shepherd in my family, community and world.
Amen.