



Sunday, 3 May, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Easter

When we began preparing these weekly pew sheets at the end of March, we had no clear idea how long they would be needed. It looks as though churches will remain closed for some weeks to come and even when they reopen, things will be rather different for some time. In those circumstances, please do continue to pray for one another and especially for those providing essential services at this time. While it is very hard that the archbishops have declared our church buildings completely closed, Sarah and I continue to be touched by the community spirit we encounter and the willingness of people to live out their faith in these most trying circumstances. I do hope that everyone is managing to stay safe and well and cope with the frustrations of lockdown. It has led me to discover the Nintendo Wii my family deposited here some years ago and try my hand at Wii Fit. Suffice it to say that I do not have a career in skiing or golf ahead of me when lockdown finally ends.

If anyone has any particular prayer requests they would like to be included on this sheet, please do let us know as we would be happy to do so. We are also happy to include the names of people in need of prayer, with their permission. In times like these, it is especially important that we pray for one another and remember the importance of community and relationship to the Christian faith.

In addition to the Fourth Sunday of Easter, this week sees the commemoration of the English Saints and Martyrs of the Reformation Era (Monday) as well as the 75th Anniversary of VE Day (Friday).

Phil

Collect and Readings for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

Almighty God;
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

First Reading (Acts 2:42-end)

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by 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.

Second Reading (1 Peter 2:19-end)

For it is to your credit if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If 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. For to this you have been called,

because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

‘He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.’

When 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. He 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. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Gospel Reading (John 10:1-10)

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 bandit. 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 did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, 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 abundantly.

Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

Phil Bradford

One of the traps we can too readily fall into, especially in an age in which you can find out all sorts of information with just a few keystrokes, is assuming that everyone has always thought in the same way that we do now. So much of our life happens almost subconsciously that it is easy to forget how things change over time, with the accompanying presumptions changing with them. Medieval folk would stare at us in bewilderment were we to talk to them of stock brokers, pilots or computer technicians, as you would look at me blankly were I to start writing about regraters, verderers or escheators. Indeed, it is arguably even worse when names have survived and we might think we are talking about the same thing. Take mayors and sheriffs as an example. Both are ancient offices with a venerable history stretching back to Norman times, and both still exist today. However, what we understand today about mayors and sheriffs is something very different from what would have made sense to an inhabitant of a medieval English city. The notion that a mayor – or anyone – might be elected by popular vote, as was due to happen in several places on Thursday, or that he would oversee a whole series of towns or cities within a conurbation rather than just a single one, would be incomprehensible to our ancestors. Likewise we would be baffled by the extensive powers held by medieval sheriffs when compared with the ceremonial office of today, our understanding hampered rather than helped by numerous fictional portrayals of Robin Hood's sheriff of Nottingham. It is so very easy to forget how culture and language change over time, and neglect to take the past on its own terms rather than ours. That is as true of the Biblical Middle East as it is of more recent and more local history. The presuppositions and world view of the Biblical era were very different to those of our own time, which means that sometimes we need to look

more carefully at Biblical texts than we sometimes realise and recognise the difference beneath superficial similarities.

That is the case as we face this morning's gospel reading. It is easy to think that it is all straightforward; after all, we all know what a sheep is and what a shepherd is. Yet even though the language of sheep and shepherds is familiar to us in everyday life and as Christians, we mainly come across it in this Biblical context, and we can be deceived into overlooking its complexity. Our interaction with the world of sheep is in most cases rather limited these days, not least in urban England. Within the Church, there is still the residual notion of the faithful as the flock, and technically you poor people reading this are the flock entrusted to Sarah's and my shepherding. Beyond that, however, the metaphor of sheep and shepherd does not really resonate with the modern world, especially for city boys like me who mainly encounter sheep either while driving past them at 70(ish) miles per hour on the motorway or else in the chilled aisle at Sainsbury's. What we do know about sheep tends to mean that most people today do not take favourably to being compared to them. Sheep have the reputation of being rather dim, spending their time cheerfully grazing and following uncritically wherever they are told to go. To tell someone they are like a sheep is not intended as a compliment, nor would anyone receive it as one. Yet those negative connotations did not apply when the gospels were written. The first- and second-century world was an agrarian one, in which the majority of people worked on the land. The language of sheep and shepherd would have been immediately comprehensible to Jesus' audience in a way it is not to us today. They would have known that a shepherd would easily have been able to tell the difference between his individual sheep, and that sheep can indeed be taught to recognise their shepherd's call. That is less obvious to modern city-dwellers. We are familiar with the

concept of the good shepherd, but the language does not speak readily into most modern experience.

Beyond that resonance with personal experience, Jesus' illustration would also have made perfect sense to a Jewish audience thoroughly grounded in their scriptures. The notion of God as a shepherd, guiding the Israelite flock, was deeply embedded in the Jewish tradition and can be found throughout the Old Testament. God shepherding his people Israel was a fundamental part of Israelite self-understanding and is an image used frequently by the prophets in particular. Shepherds also had a more literal role in the Old Testament story. David was initially a shepherd boy, the role from which he was called to replace Saul as king and thus become a very different type of shepherd, one acting on behalf of God to guide the Israelite kingdom. That Old Testament background, as ever, is critical to what John writes in his gospel as well as to the other evangelists. Jesus follows in that Davidic tradition – remember the importance attached in the birth narratives to Jesus being of David's line – as well as echoing the concept of God as shepherd. In claiming the role of the good shepherd, Jesus is consciously associating himself with God and making a clear claim about his identity. Yet by association, he is also making a statement about his followers, for like sheep responding to their shepherd, only those who are truly of God will know and respond to his call.

So the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep is not, as the uninitiated modern reader might believe, about God in the role of shepherd compelling dull-witted humanity to do what he wants. It is rather a commentary on the building of a relationship. Shepherds did not simply sit idly watching the sheep. The shepherd was deeply invested in his flock, in looking after them, seeing they were fed and protecting them

from wolves and other dangers. He built a genuine relationship with his sheep, who learned to know him and trust him, and respond to his voice. Those sheep were not as English sheep might seem to us, indistinguishable fluffy things destined for the dinner table, but rather individuals whose characters the shepherd came to know. Hence the comparison between God and shepherd and humanity and sheep is meant to illustrate the depth of the relationship which exists between God and humankind. Humanity, for all its belief in its own power and omnipotence, is capable of great stupidity. Whatever we may believe, we need guidance, we often need protecting from dangers to which we are oblivious or which we create ourselves. As the shepherd knows his sheep, so God knows each of us by name, encourages us with his call and seeks to protect us. Like the shepherd who faces up to the wolf, his relationship with us verges on the reckless and extends to everyone; think about the parable of the lost sheep, when the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to find the single animal who has gone astray. God's love is not partial, but rather like the shepherd he is concerned with the welfare of the whole flock. There is no person who lies beyond his love, no person to whom he does not call, and that is the essence of the divine-human relationship which he seeks to build. The question is whether we are both capable of and willing to recognise God's voice calling to us, and of responding to that call within our own lives.

English Saints and Martyrs of the Reformation Era

Monday 4 May

The Reformation tore Europe apart, England being no exception. A corrupt, oppressive Roman Catholic Church which had in many senses lost its way and ceased to embody the Gospel was confronted by zealous, intolerant Protestant movements. Both claimed that they alone held the truth of Christianity and the consequence was that the sixteenth century was drenched in blood. In the shifts of allegiance, the beheadings, the burnings, the torture, the relentless fighting and cruelty, we can discern today precious little of the peace and love of Christ. Cruel men such as Henry VIII and brutal hypocrites like Thomas More flourished. Yet today we remember all those who held faith in God regardless, the many innocent souls who suffered for failing to politicise their beliefs or deny a vision of God greater than the partisan deity invoked by the rulers and religious authorities. As we do so, we pray too for a vision which looks beyond the limited squabbles of humankind to the eternal reign of God.

Merciful God,
who when your Church on earth
was torn apart by the ravages of sin,
raised up men and women in this land
who witnessed to their faith with courage and constancy:
give to your Church that peace which is your will,
and grant that those who have been divided on earth
may be reconciled in heaven,
and share together in the vision of your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

First Reading (2 Corinthians 4:5-12)

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Gospel Reading (John 12:20-26)

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.'

75th Anniversary of VE Day

Friday, 8 May

Today we mark 75 years since the end of the European part of World War II (hostilities in Asia continued until August 1945). This is not an occasion for triumphalism, but rather one to remember all those who lost their lives in a vicious conflict and the sacrifices made against the evils of Nazism. The Queen will address the nation today, as her father did in 1945. While I was trying to find something appropriate, I reread George VI's speech from that day and it immediately struck me how well it has stood the test of time. When George died in 1952, one of the most perceptive verdicts on his life was sent by the French ambassador in London, René Massigli, to his foreign minister in Paris. If the measure of a king lies in the way in which his character and qualities correspond to the needs of a nation at a given moment in its history, wrote Massigli, 'George VI was a great king, and perhaps a very great king ... Courage, work and austerity have been the watchwords of the country over the last fifteen years, and one could say that the King provided an example of them ... He had to learn everything at the age of 41 on ascending the throne. And he learned quickly and well.'¹ A shy man not born to be king, afflicted by a stutter, George nevertheless embodied a nation which resolutely faced a situation no one wanted and yet succeeded. World War II was a time of sacrifice and suffering, which in Europe included the previously unimaginable horror of the Holocaust. Whatever I may think as a historian, today I think it appropriate simply to allow the words of King George VI to speak from that day, for they capture like nothing else could the conflicting emotions of joy, of relief, of pain, of weariness, of sadness and of mourning that were felt on that day in 1945, when it was all over. Perhaps most importantly, he looked forward as well as back, and as we commemorate what happening on 8 May 1945, so too we should strive to ensure it was not in vain.

¹ Cited in Sarah Bradford, *George VI* (London, 1989), p. 611.

‘Today we give thanks to Almighty God for a great deliverance. Speaking from our Empire’s oldest capital city, war-battered but never for on moment daunted or dismayed - speaking from London, I ask you to join with me in that act of thanksgiving.



‘Germany, the enemy who drove all Europe into war, has been finally overcome. In the Far East we have yet to deal with the Japanese, a determined and cruel foe. To this we shall turn with the utmost resolve and with all our resources. But at this hour, when the dreadful shadow of war has passed far from our hearths and homes in these islands, we may at last make one pause for thanksgiving and then turn our thoughts to the tasks all over the world which peace in Europe brings with it.

‘Let us remember those who will not come back: their constancy and courage in battle, their sacrifice and endurance in the face of a merciless enemy; let us remember the men in all the services, and the women in all the services, who have laid down their lives. We have come to the end of our tribulation and they are not with us at the moment of our rejoicing.

‘Then let us salute in proud gratitude the great host of the living who have brought us to victory. I cannot praise them to the measure of each one’s service, for in a total war, the efforts of all rise to the same noble height, and all are devoted to the common purpose.

‘Armed or unarmed, men and women, you have fought and striven and endured to your utmost. No-one knows that better than I do, and as your King, I thank with a full heart those who bore arms so valiantly on land and sea, or in the air, and all civilians who, shouldering their many burdens, have carried them unflinchingly without complaint.

‘With those memories in our minds, let us think what it was that has upheld us through nearly six years of suffering and peril. The knowledge that everything was at stake: our freedom, our independence, our very existence as a people; but the knowledge also that in defending ourselves we were defending the liberties of the whole world; that our cause was the cause not of this nation only, not of this Empire and Commonwealth only, but of every land where freedom is cherished and law and liberty go hand in hand.

‘In the darkest hours we knew that the enslaved and isolated peoples of Europe looked to us, their hopes were our hopes, their confidence confirmed our faith. We knew that, if we failed, the last remaining barrier against a worldwide tyranny would have fallen in ruins.

‘But we did not fail. We kept faith with ourselves and with one another, we kept faith and unity with our great allies. That faith, that unity have carried us to victory through dangers which at times seemed overwhelming.

‘So let us resolve to bring to the tasks which lie ahead the same high confidence in our mission. Much hard work awaits us both in the restoration of our own country after the ravages of war, and in helping to restore peace and sanity to a shattered world.

‘This comes upon us at a time when we have all given of our best. For five long years and more, heart and brain, nerve and muscle, have been directed upon the overthrow of Nazi tyranny. Now we turn, fortified by success, to deal with our last remaining foe. The Queen and I know the ordeals which you have endured throughout the Commonwealth and Empire. We are proud to have shared some of these ordeals with you and we know also that we together shall all face the future with stern resolve and prove that our reserves of will-power and vitality are inexhaustible.

‘There is great comfort in the thought that the years of darkness and danger in which the children of our country have grown up are over and, please God, forever. We shall have failed and the blood of our dearest will have flowed in vain if the victory which they died to win does not lead to a lasting peace, founded on justice and good will.

‘To that, then, let us turn our thoughts to this day of just triumph and proud sorrow, and then take up our work again, resolved as a people to do nothing unworthy of those who died for us, and to make the world such a world as they would have desired for their children and for ours.

‘This is the task to which now honour binds us. In the hour of danger we humbly committed our cause into the hand of God and he has been our strength and shield. Let us thank him for his mercies and in this hour of victory commit ourselves and our new task to the guidance that same strong hand.’

*O God of truth and justice,
we hold before you those whose memory we cherish,
and those whose names we will never know.
Help us to lift our eyes above the torment of this broken world,
and grant us the grace to pray for those who wish us harm.
As we honour the past, may we put our faith in your future;
for you are the source of life and hope, now and for ever. Amen.*

*God grant to the living grace, to the departed rest,
to the Church, the Queen, the Commonwealth and all people,
unity, peace and concord,
and to us and all God’s servants, life everlasting;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always. Amen.*

Notices

Finance and Assistance

As the lockdown continues and we face uncertainty about when and how it will end, this is a very difficult time for many people. For whatever reason, there will be those struggling to make ends meet, pay bills or buy necessities at this time. While we do not have huge resources, there are various funds the churches have to help people with small sums towards covering costs in times of need. We are also able to refer people to other agencies for additional assistance. If anyone needs help, please do contact the clergy. If you are aware of anyone else who might benefit from assistance at this time, please encourage them to contact the clergy too. We aim to help the community, irrespective of whether or not they are church members, so do make this known.

I would like to thank all those who have continued to support the churches financially during this difficult period, by standing order or direct debit. It is much appreciated; although the churches may be closed, many of the costs (utility bills, insurance, parish share, etc.) have to be paid as normal. We are also continuing to provide what financial support we can to the community and charities at this time. If you normally give by envelope or directly onto the collection plate, could I ask you to consider a standing order or perhaps sending a cheque? Not everyone is in a position to maintain their regular giving, but if those who are able to do so could help out, it obviously allows us to continue our work and be in a stronger position when this all ends. Our treasurers, Chris Rees (St John's) and Philip Evans (St Michael's) would be happy to answer any queries.

Above all, continue to pray for all those in need at this time.

Important Numbers

Childline	0800 1111
Samaritans	116 123
Domestic Violence Hotline	0808 2000 247
The Survivors Trust	0808 801 0181
Mind	0300 123 3393
Age UK	0800 169 6565

Care Homes

With care homes in lockdown, their residents are particularly isolated at this time. Juniper House have told us that they would especially appreciate it if anyone were able to write letters, or children were able to draw bright pictures, to cheer people up and give them some contact with others during a difficult period. There are further details on the St Michael's website and Facebook page (see below), or please do contact Philip Evans (number on the back page) if you would be able to help.

Resources

A reminder of our online presence.

St John's Website	www.stjohninbedwardine.co.uk
St Michael's Website	www.stmichaels.westworcesterchurches.org.uk
St John's Facebook	www.facebook.com/stjohninbedwardine
St Michael's Facebook	www.facebook.com/stmichaelsdinesgreen

Various prayer resources and information are also available on the Church of England website. For those without internet access, the archbishop of Canterbury has launched a 24-hour freephone number for a service called Daily Hope, which offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services: **0800 804 8044**.