

Sunday 26 April 2026
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Collect:

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.

Readings for this week:

Genesis 7; Psalm 23; Acts 2:42-47; John 10:1-10

Genesis 7, which weaves two different versions of the Flood into one account, seems like a strange starting place for today's readings. If we are looking for an Easter theme, then it might be in the saving of creation, hidden away in the ark as in a tomb, reappearing once the devastation is over to bring new life to the earth. But there is also Noah faithfully carrying out of God's commands, even while under extreme duress. By following God's instructions he ensures that despite the great wickedness on earth that has led to its destruction, the best of creation, the goodness at its heart, will be shepherded and nurtured afresh.

Just as the ark is an aspect of God's stewardship, so the rod and staff in Psalm 23 are elements of God's protective and disciplining nature. The writer is in a place of deep despair, but the presence of the Lord, in the guise of a shepherd, is both constant and offers sound guidance. The trust between sheep and shepherd is mutual, both require the other, but it is the shepherd who has responsibility for their continued flourishing. This comes to the fore when they travel across dangerous terrain, with the shepherd ascertaining the safest route and standing watch against potential attackers. This is wise stewardship that benefits both sheep and shepherd.

In the passage from Acts, one of the book's many vignettes showing the shared life of the infant Church, we meet another form of stewardship. This is corporate, with everyone taking responsibility for the rest of the community, both practically in holding possessions in common and ritually – breaking bread in each other's homes as a sign of their togetherness.

The illustrations of sheep, shepherds and gates in John 10 return us to the imagery of Psalm 23. This is a multidimensional passage, eluding any simple, single explanation, but it builds upon descriptions of sheep and shepherds throughout the Hebrew scriptures. God is the shepherd who walks with their sheep, who makes themselves vulnerable for their sheep and who is never off duty, who does not discriminate between members of the flock and who provides an example of engaged, unselfish leadership which all should aspire to.

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. Amen.

Readings for next week:

Genesis 8:1-19; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; Acts 7:55-60; John 14:1-14
Fifth Sunday of Easter