



**The Benefice of  
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme  
Sunday 25 April 2021: The Fourth Sunday of Easter**

**Stuart Falkner leads our worship today**

***Preparation***

**Call to Worship**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed! Alleluia.**

We gather together to worship God.  
**The shepherd of our souls.**

The one who created us,  
**He sustains us and redeems us**

The one who walks beside us in good times and bad  
**He calls us to follow.**

This is our God.  
**Let us worship him together. Amen**

**Prayers of Penitence**

Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us.  
Let us therefore rejoice by putting away all malice and evil  
And by confessing our sins with a sincere and a true heart.

Remember, Lord, your compassion and love,  
For they are everlasting.  
Lord have mercy: **Lord have mercy**

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions  
But think on me in your goodness, O Lord,  
According to your steadfast love.  
Christ have mercy: **Christ have mercy.**

O keep my soul and deliver me:  
Let me not be put to shame, for I have put my trust in you.  
Lord have mercy: **Lord have mercy.**

Absolution

The Lord enrich you with his grace,  
And nourish you with his blessing;  
The Lord defend you in trouble and keep you from all evil;  
The Lord accept your prayers  
And absolve you from your offences,  
For the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. **Amen.**

The 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**

## **THE WORD OF GOD**

First Reading

### **Acts 4:5-12**

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to

all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is

“the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;  
it has become the cornerstone.”

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.’

**Thanks be to God for the gift of His word**

**Second Reading**

**John 10:7-18**

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.

‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.’

**Thanks be to God for the gift of His Holy Word**

## Reflection by Tony Mills

I don't know if any of you are fans of "Our Yorkshire Farm", which follows the fortunes of Amanda and Clive Owen and their nine children on a remote sheep farm in the Yorkshire Dales. It is a lovely programme and reminds us just how tough being a shepherd can be, even in this day and age. However, if we are not careful it is easy to slip into a rather sentimental image when it comes to thinking about Jesus the "Good Shepherd". It was an image certainly loved by the Victorians, and I'm sure we have all seen pictures of Jesus surrounded by sheep looking adoringly at him! However, the theology underpinning Jesus as the Good Shepherd is actually very profound and not at all sentimental. In fact, the concept of the good shepherd is one that is essentially very strong and courageous. It speaks to us of the shepherd's total commitment to the flock. It speaks to us of his intimate knowledge of his sheep. It speaks to us of total self-giving; the shepherd's love is total, the sheep are his complete concern!

The image of the shepherd was first used in the Old Testament when it was God himself who was portrayed as the shepherd and Israel was his flock (see the prophetic works of Isaiah and Ezekiel). It was this foundational symbol Jesus was using in his teaching. When we encounter it in John's Gospel as we did this morning, like most of his teaching, the narrative is multi-layered and contains many different levels of interpretation.

One layer is to remember that God himself revealed his name to Moses as "I am" and so the "I am" sayings of Jesus (I am the Bread of Life; the door; the Light of the World, the true Vine; the Good Shepherd etc) in John's Gospel are all statements about Jesus's divinity. We are told Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" because he knows his sheep and willingly lays down his life for them, unlike the hired man.

In the many ways in which that image of the shepherd was used throughout Israel's history, nowhere was it suggested the shepherd willingly laid down his life for his sheep. Of course, that may have been a reality for some working shepherds with so many wild animals prowling around. But nowhere in the history of Israel does that aspect come to the fore - except here. Jesus includes the shepherd's willingness to lay down his life out of love for those in his care. In his Passion that is exactly what the Lord Jesus did for us. He is the Good Shepherd not just because he was willing to lay down his life for his sheep, but because he actually did so.

It is important for us to remember that Jesus the Good Shepherd is now the risen Jesus, who continues to know, love and lead the flock in his care. He calls and invites us into a close and loving relationship with him. He leads us to heaven, and also leads us to greater unity. The risen Lord also invites us with him, to be good shepherds to others. No, the Good Shepherd isn't a sentimental image, but one that speaks of strength, courage and compassion. May our worship help us to hear his voice.

### Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,  
From whom every family  
In heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,  
Who lives in our hearts through faith,  
And fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
Who strengthens us  
With power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

## Prayers of Intercession led by Debbie Child

Let us pray to the Father, giving thanks for his great and enduring love, which never stops seeking us out, never fades and never lets go.

Father we pray for the Church, the Body of Christ and for all our collected gifts and weaknesses. We pray for Nick our Bishop and for all who lead us, for Richard, Liz, Mavis, Tony and Ian, and for those who in so many different ways, give so much of their lives in the service of others. We pray for the discernment process for our new clergy team member, that the right person will stand out. We give thanks for our soon-to-be new curate, Anna; we pray for her as she completes her training, is ordained in Ripon, and prepares to move to her first post here in our benefice.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our Prayer**

We pray for your world in all its beauty and richness; give us the desire to share our food and sustain our resources, to care for the people across the world and to play our part in fostering peace and justice. We pray for those areas of the world where people are badly treated, where there is no equality, where governments put self before people. We pray for this country – where people are still homeless, lack food and shelter and love and care. We come before you Lord with all those difficulties around us, with our own priorities beckoning us, and pray that you will give us the means, the will, the commitment, and the love to reach out to those who need us.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our Prayer**

We pray for all those who are struggling, those who are afraid, lonely, unemployed, those who are suffering, physically or mentally; those who are lonely and those who feel unloved. We pray for those who mourn, remembering all those we know who have died recently, those who have died in the pandemic and all those who continue to suffer. We remember especially those members of our churches who are not fit enough to be in church today, and in silence we remember those we know in need of our prayers.....

Father through your love, may they find peace of mind and the strength and courage to cope with the future

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our Prayer**

Father we pray in thankfulness for your shepherding of us, and own you as our Good Shepherd in whom we are kept safe forever. We pray that we might recognise the freedom you have given us through the death and resurrection of your Son, and we give thanks for the grace of the risen Christ in our lives.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our Prayer**

Lord give us wisdom before we speak, understanding while we listen, sensitivity towards those we meet, and the perspective of your kingdom in which to see the things of earth. Bring us to the day's ending, blessed through having shared the day's beginning with each other and with you.

Merciful father

**accept these prayers for the sake of your son,  
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

## The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our trespasses  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory  
For ever and ever. Amen.**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### Final Prayer

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**

#### Blessing

The God of peace,  
Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ  
That great shepherd of the sheep,  
Through the blood of the eternal covenant,  
Make you perfect in every good work to do his will,  
Working in you that which is pleasing in his sight;  
And the blessing of God almighty,  
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
Be among you and remain with you always. **Amen**

#### Sending out

Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord! Alleluia! Alleluia!  
**In the name of Christ. Amen. Alleluia! Alleluia!**