

## **A Sunday Service for the Churches of the Bride Valley on the Fourth Sunday of Easter 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020**

The service for today has been prepared by the Reverend Jane Williams and is also available to listen to on **01308 293062**

Please also join us for coffee (bring your own) and an online chat on Sundays at 10am, if you'd like to by following this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83954023559?pwd=djdyZVFiTVJsdXJ5NkFRaDh0SS9lZz09>

In preparation for the service you may wish to listen to these bells chosen by Rob Bryan, the Steeple Keeper at St Mary's Church in Burton Bradstock.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHICTU8vZOg>

### **WELCOME EVERYONE**

'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forevermore.' Psalm 23 verses 5-6

#### **Opening Prayer**

Almighty God, your Son has opened for us a new and living way into your presence.

Give us new hearts and constant wills to worship you in Spirit and in truth;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

#### **Confession**

Like Mary at the empty tomb,

We fail to grasp the wonder of your presence.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Like the disciples behind locked doors,

We are afraid to be seen as your followers.

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Like Thomas in the upper room,

We are slow to believe.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

#### **Absolution**

May God who loved the world so much that he gave his only Son

To be our saviour,

Forgive us our sins

And make us holy to serve him in this world.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

#### **The Collect** (special prayer for today)

Let us pray:

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.**

**Gospel reading**  
**John 10 verses 1-10**

**The Good Shepherd and His Sheep**

**10** “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <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 listen to 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 on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.<sup>[a]</sup> They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

This is the gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you O Christ.**

**Reflection by the Reverend Jane Williams**

**“Living life to the full!”**  
adapted from John 10.10

I’m almost certain that some of you will have looked at that title and will be thinking to yourself – you must be mad, Jane, how can we live life to the full, when we have all these restrictions placed on us, when we are living in fear of an awful virus that’s affecting the whole world. We can’t even go and worship God in our own church, in our own familiar way?

Well, believe it or not, at the beginning of lockdown, when it was all so uncertain and felt so limiting I felt exactly the same way, but not anymore.

Certain things have changed my mind.

There are lots of reasons why my thinking has changed and many of you reading and listening to this have brought some of the answers to me.

We are now on Day 42 of lockdown and what I have been seeing and hearing about from across the Bride Valley has been nothing short of amazing.

Each of the villages has a community within it who are looking out for each other. Neighbours, some who haven’t spoken together for ages, carrying out errands, fetching and carrying, checking in and generally looking out for the most vulnerable and in fact everyone in their neighbourhood. There is evidence of care and compassion like most of us have not witnessed in our lifetime. And even for those who have, it was a very long time ago. This is what it was like during the war Jane, is what I’m hearing.

During telephone conversations or when passing people by in my car on an essential journey or walking during my daily exercise. Even on Thursdays when I’m clapping for the NHS and all keyworkers with my neighbours, I hear all sorts of hopeful stories, of answered prayers and I’m beginning to get to know this community better, in a deeper and more meaningful way than would have been possible before.

A question I’m often being asked is “Where is God in all of this?”

I’m a firm believer that God is everywhere and now more than ever I feel that He is right here with us, in amidst of all the fear and uncertainty, looking out for each and every one of us.

Just like that Good Shepherd of the sheep we have read about in John's gospel, all we need to do is listen out for him. He knows each one of us by name and will 'lead us out'.

Jesus gave us a picture of that group of sheep feeling safe in their sheepfold. Waiting for the voice of their shepherd, their master to lead them. I think God's voice is saying to each of us – "Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy one is here".

Where is God? He is here with us, we can see him in the faces of our helpful neighbours, in the way that all those keyworkers feel compelled to support us all by stepping out into the unknown danger to fulfil whatever role they have to keep the country going. We can see it in the face of the Mums and Dads who carry on reassuring their children even though they are fearful themselves. We can see it in the teaching and support staff at our schools. Some of us are privileged to see it in the faces of prison officers when dealing with the prisoners in their care or the funeral directors doing all they can to support a grieving family and in carers trying their very best to protect the cared for. Despite the difficulties of life at the moment, what I'm seeing is people living life in a very meaningful way, appreciating the surrounding beauty more than ever before, connecting with others at a deeper human level. Surely this has to be life in all its fullness! Amen.

### **The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
Born of the virgin Mary,  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died and was buried;  
He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
He ascended into heaven'  
He is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
And he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,

The holy catholic Church,  
The communion of saints,  
The forgiveness of sins,  
The resurrection of the body,  
And the life everlasting,  
**Amen.**

### **Intercessions**

***Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has come so that we may have life in rich abundance.***

We pray for the whole Church; for all congregations, separate, yet united in worship, for our ministers and in particular our Archbishop Justin, Bishops Nicholas and Karen, for our Archdeacon Penny and for our governor, Queen Elizabeth.

And for all those in authority we pray for clear guidance and direction at this unprecedented time.

The Lord is my shepherd: **there is nothing I shall want.**

May is a month where some would be looking forward to the Cup Final, the start of the cricket season, some of us would usually be preparing for our fetes. It's a time when the National Trust opens its doors to visitors, but not this year.

What we are learning anew are fresh ways of connecting with the space immediately around us, how to appreciate new ways of connecting with people near and far. Thank you for the variety of different ways in which we can enjoy the abundant life that Jesus promised. In everything may we know the love of Christ and be thankful.

The Lord is my shepherd: **there is nothing I shall want.**

We pray for the weak and vulnerable, for those who must live depending on others for every need. We pray for those in abusive relationships, male or female, young or old, please help them to seek out the support they need and when they do find that courage, send the right people, the right resources to their aid. We pray for all our relationships, for a greater understanding of what it means to be community, a new way of living together, at this time and maintained into the future.

The Lord is my shepherd: **there is nothing I shall want.**

We pray for the victims of coronavirus, for their friends and family, for those currently fighting the symptoms and for those looking after them and for the protection of everyone having to go to work to support the country at this time of uncertainty. We pray for those working on testing people suspected of having the virus, for scientists developing a suitable vaccine, for those working out ways for the restrictions to be lifted safely and ultimately a swift end to the pandemic, not just for us here in the UK, but for the whole world.

The Lord is my shepherd: **there is nothing I shall want.**

Good Shepherd of the sheep, we give you thanks for all you have done for us and for continuing to be in our lives, so that we are able, in good times and also through times of uncertainty, live life abundantly.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

## **Conclusion**

Bless the Lord, O my soul;  
**And forget not all his benefits;**

Who forgives all your sins  
**And heals your infirmities;**

Who redeems your life from the Pit;  
**And crowns you with faithful love and compassion.**

*The service ends with the Peace*

Peace to you from God our Father, who hears our cry.  
Peace from his Son Jesus Christ, whose death brings healing,  
Peace from the Holy Spirit, who gives us life and strength.  
**The Peace of the Lord be always with you.**