

Sunday 3rd May 2020 – 4th of Easter

Welcome & Announcements

Call to worship

Praise- *'Be thou my vision'*

Prayer

OT reading – video psalm 23

Gospel reading – John 10:1-10 Ossie Bruce

Sermon

Prayers for Others

Hymn 'Mp 1008 The Lords my shepherd 15/9/19

Closing Prayer

Communion 'Live' 12 Noon Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/regentstreetmethodistnewtownards/>

Welcome & Announcements

Good morning and welcome to our online service of worship for Regent Street Methodist Church in Newtownards. If you are visiting our website today then you are especially welcome.

Firstly, just a couple of announcements to remind you about. Firstly there is an opportunity to share in our 'live' Holy Communion at 12noon this Sunday 3rd May on our Regent St Methodist FACEBOOK pg If you would like to share with us in that then please remember to have some bread and grape juice ready to share.

Secondly a reminder that next week is our annual service focusing on the work of Christian Aid. Following next week's service we hope to raise some much needed funds for C Aid by encouraging as many of you as possible to sit down at home & share in a bread & cheese lunch. The idea is that we will all sit down at 12noon together to share our lunches & if possible we will give an online donation to C Aid at

We are also encouraging those of you who are on Zoom, or who would like to download the app, to come online together and say hello. Please contact Laura Ewing so that she can send out the email invitation link to you laura.ewing@irishmethodist.org

For those of you not able to do that, then perhaps you could take a photo of yourselves eating lunch & email it to John Steen for inclusion in next week's service. john.steen@irishmethodist.org

Finally just a quick word on finance, as this difficult period continues so the financial challenges facing our church increases. With that in mind I would like to remind you that you can make bank transfers online or set up a direct debit. However we are aware that for some of you this is difficult so our treasurer Judith Ming has kindly now said that she will accept posted cheques with your envelope number included. Judith's address has been including in the church emails that have been sent out & if you didn't receive that then you can contact me &

I can direct you.

So now let us take a moment of quiet as we prepare our hearts to worship God. So we hear our call to worship from a well known hymn.

Call to worship

'Jesus! Our Shepherd, brother, friend, our Prophet, Priest, and King; You are Our Lord, our Life, our Way, & End, So please now accept the praise we bring.

We now lift our voices to God in praise as we sing '**Be thou my vision**'.

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art—
thou my best thought by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.
Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father, I thy true son;
thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.
Be thou my battle shield, sword for my fight;
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,
thou my soul's shelter, thou my high tower:
raise thou me heav'n-ward, O Power of my power.
Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always:
thou and thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.
High King of heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heav'n's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Prayer

Lord God, we come now to worship You, for You are the high king of heaven, the wondrous God who creates & keeps. You are our light, our love, our Lord,

the Ruler of all. And You are our souls shelter, our high tower, the God who draws near & shields us in the midst of storms.

High King of heaven we worship you this day as the One who is beyond all we can imagine, & yet also as the One who draws near us. Saving God through Jesus Christ your only Son You rescue us from darkness & death. Jesus who is *Our Shepherd, brother, friend, our prophet, priest & king*. Jesus who saves & bestows abundant life....

Yet as we call You king and Good shepherd, so too we remember that all we like sheep have gone astray...each to their own ways.

So in a moment of silence we once more have that opportunity to confess our sins to God and receive his fresh grace through Jesus the Son.

'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.' For *'you were like sheep going astray,' but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* 1 Peter 2:24-25

In Christ our sins are forgiven...

Our Old Testament reading is going to take the form of a video of Psalm 23. The Lord's my Shepherd' and following that we will have our gospel reading from John 10.

John 10:1-10

"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.² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.³ 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.⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

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

Sermon.... Pebbles... Pebbles... that's the call that goes out most evenings from our kitchen door as one of our family call our cat pebbles in for the evening. And mostly, if she is within earshot, we quickly hear a jingle of the little bell on her collar as she makes her way in to home & safety... You see even our cat recognises the trusted voice of the people who provide food, shelter & the odd treat or 2! And recognising the call, she comes... . Being brought up in North Belfast I am far from being an expert on sheep but I have been told by others that they are not the brightest of animals... I believe that they tend to wander, get themselves into trouble & need a lot of care....

I wonder if that is why the scriptures so often use the metaphor of sheep and the shepherd when they come to describe the relationship between God and His people? Could it be that we as human beings, like sheep, have that tendency to wander & get ourselves into trouble? Could it be that all of us, even those who look to be, quite good & normal, are actually in much greater need than we like to think or admit? The scriptures tells us that the answer to these questions is yes... *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;* Isa 53:6

But mercifully scripture also tells us that Jesus is the true shepherd, the one who Ezekiel prophesied about many years before, the one who would .. *look for My flock....and rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered* Ezk 34:12

Of course there were others in Jesus' day that also saw themselves as shepherds, others who wanted people to follow them. So we see in this passage Jesus debating with the Pharisees, pointing to himself as being the true shepherd of the sheep. And one of the proofs that Jesus gives for his claim, is the fact that his sheep listen to his voice. Jhn 10:3

You see while sheep might not be the smartest animals around even they can recognise the difference between the voice of their shepherd who cares for them and the voices of strangers who don't. Our world has always been full of different voices that would call on people to follow their teaching or advice, and accept their authority. As those who seek to follow the true shepherd we need to pray that God gives us '*ears that hear*.' Mk 4:9 Yes we desperately need to be guided by God in this distressing, fast changing time. We need to hear the voice of Jesus for ourselves, and the good news is that here in this passage Jesus says we can!

Most of us will probably nod our heads at that and say yes God speaks to his people today. However perhaps underneath that we are thinking.... yes ... BUT God probably won't speak to me... maybe to a Minister or a preacher or a missionary ... But me? No I am just an ordinary Christian.... nothing special, someone with worries and doubts and questions.... Just ordinary... maybe a little like a sheep? So listen again now, as Jesus tells us that ***his sheep follow him because they know his voice vs4.***

As I said, if there was ever a time when we desperately need to hear the voice of Jesus, isn't it now? Don't we need to hear Jesus call us by name vs3? Don't we need him to lead and guide us in the way ahead vs4? Aren't we

yearning for the assurance of his protection & salvation vs 9? Don't we desire that freedom that Jesus gives vs9?

Yes we and our world need to hear Jesus' voice at this time, a time when many of the words of the false shepherds are being exposed for what they truly are. Over the past decades many voices have told us that '*life to the full*' was to be found in consumerism, that satisfaction could be bought if you just had a big enough bank account. Other voices also pointed to the power of science and perhaps suggested that everything could be explained and everything could be dealt with through the wonders of modern technology. As difficult & as sad as this crisis is, perhaps it has reminded us & others that true '*life to the full*' vs10 isn't found in what we own, where we can travel too or even in what we do, but rather in who we know.

And as we take that in, can I leave you with one final thought? Some words from of all places an article on sheep from a farming website! There we are told that '*Sheep also have a strong instinct to follow. When one sheep decides to go somewhere the other will follow it. They'll do this whether or not it's a good decision or bad decision. Generally, the oldest members of the flock will take the lead, the sheep will then follow them. Lambs will instinctively follow their mothers and other older herd members.*' kippax-farms.co.uk/sheep

As we listen to the good shepherd and follow him, let's dare to pray and believe that others will actually see how we walk & begin to follow the good shepherd for themselves.

Let us pray– God our great & good shepherd, as we still ourselves now we ask that you may help us hear your voice.

Jesus, help us hear you call us by name. Give us ears to hear your voice, the voice of the one who would not only lay down in front of the sheep pen to protect us, but the one who laid down his life to rescue us... Lord wherever we are and whatever circumstances we face help us hear your voice clearly this morning.

Then gracious guide, we ask you also to lead us and give us strength, courage & faith to follow you. Help us follow faithfully not just for our own sakes, but also for the sakes of those who may see our example and decide to come along....

Let us continue now to pray for others.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

Lord God we pray that you would guide all in leadership positions during this time of crisis. For our prime minister Boris Johnston & his cabinet, for our first and deputy first ministers Arlene Foster & Michelle O'Neill, for other world leaders those in other European nations, the USA, Russia & those leading developing nations.

Lord lead those who are leading others, give them insight and provide them with the right information so that they can make wise decisions.

He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

Lord we pray for your Church in the world. May every Christian be a person of hope, may we show the path of righteousness through our daily lives. Lord we also pray that You would restore your Church through this time.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;

For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Lord God we continue to pray for those who are walking through dark valleys at this time and for those who care for them.

We pray for all those who are seriously sick in hospital, those with Covid 19 & those with other ailments. We particularly remember Sammy at this time, also remember Elsbeth, Elsie, Clifford & 2 young boys Daniel & Timothy. Lord we pray not only for healing but also for a peace that flows from knowing that you will never leave them nor forsake them.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

We pray also for all those who are caring for the sick & for the community at large. For all key-workers & the vital roles they play, we ask for protection, encouragement & hope. We pray that You would fill their cups to overflowing with what they need.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.

Lord we pray for those who have experienced great loss during this time. For those who have been parted from loved ones, sometimes unable even to say goodbye. We remember those from our own church family who have lost family recently. For Ann, for Ian, Marie & their families, for the family of Doris Stewart, Claire & Rikki, & for David Kyle, his mother, brother & wider family following his Dad's death. Lord surround them in your comfort.

& we say together the prayer that Jesus gave us.... ***Our Father who art in heaven....***

We will now join in singing *The Lord's my shepherd.*

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;

He makes me lie in pastures green.

He leads me by the still, still waters,

His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in You alone,

And I will trust in You alone,

For Your endless mercy follows me,

Your goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,

And He anoints my head with oil,

And my cup, it overflows with joy,

I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

Prayer– May the good shepherd lead us through the pastures of this world,
feeding us with his life and strengthening us with his love. Amen

Finally just a reminder that if you turn to our Regent St Methodist Facebook
page at 12 noon you will be able to share in a short communion service.