

Worship at Home

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Today, as we come consciously into the presence of our risen Lord, we are reminded of his call to us, to be his people, and his desire that, as his people, we should know life in all its fullness.

The Psalmist writes:

'Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever.' (Psalm 100)

MP 307: I will enter his gates

I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart,
I will enter His courts with praise.
I will say this is the day that the Lord has made,
I will rejoice for He has made me glad.

He has made me glad, He has made me glad,
I will rejoice for He has made me glad.
He has made me glad, He has made me glad,
I will rejoice for He has made me glad.

Leona Von Brethorst.

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Together we pray:

Almighty God, we come to you today with hearts that sing with gratitude and even joy as we give thanks for the risen Jesus. Thank you Lord, that through him we are counted as your people and given new life.

Today, as we come to You, we are once again full of wonder as we think of all that Jesus has done for us. That he knows each and every one of us by name is so amazing; that he should care for us so much that he was ready to suffer on the cross, for us, to set us free from all the powers of darkness that inhabit this world - so humbling. As we think on what it cost him to become that gate through which we are saved, we do indeed praise you for Jesus.

Yet even as we praise you for this Lord, we know in our hearts that we only have to look away from you, or listen to other voices for a moment, and the darkness Jesus has banished can creep back into our lives. Forgive us Lord, for the times when we have allowed that darkness back in, whether consciously or carelessly, whether through choice or just without thought. Forgive us too for listening to the voices that call us away from your side. Forgive us and help us to hear your voice again, calling us back to you; calling us to follow; calling us out into the green pastures of the new life you offer us in Jesus' name.

Lord, bless us with a deep awareness of your presence with us as we spend time with you today, for we come to you and ask this in the name of Jesus, who is our one and only Saviour. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Read: Acts 2 verses 42-47

Our first reading reminds us how Jesus' new life was lived out in the early church...

'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles....'

Read: John 10 verses 1-10

Our second reading records words spoken by Jesus to the Pharisees, who may well have thought of themselves as religious gatekeepers. They did not want to recognise Jesus as the Son of Man, or hear what he taught...

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

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

Reflect

The gospel passage we have heard today reminds us of one of the 'I am' sayings of Jesus. Shepherds and sheep are a common picture in the Bible, often used to describe the relationship between God and his people – who he calls 'the sheep of his pasture'.

The picture here though, is slightly different. Jesus says, **"I am the gate for the sheep. I have come that they may have abundant life"**.

In saying this, Jesus reminds those he was speaking to, and us, that he came, not just to keep us safe, but also to lead us into the green pastures of the new life he offers to us. While there may be times when the safety of the sheepfold is needed, this was not where sheep were ever intended to live their lives. Rather their natural home is roaming on the hillside. Their best life is lived there, alongside their shepherd.

Jesus is aware of the distrust the Pharisees have of him, “*Yes others have come and tried to break in...*” he says, “*...but I come in the right way, and I am the way through which those you have wanted to keep safe will be blessed by God. They already recognise me by my voice as their shepherd, and maybe you should too.*” I think Jesus wants the Pharisees to recognise who he really is, but they do not see him clearly.

One of the anomalies we sometimes stumble over in this reading is that Jesus uses the pictures of himself as both the gate and as the shepherd. Where we, with our modern understanding, may find this difficult, those around Jesus probably didn't. For their picture would have been of a shepherd who would lie in the gateway of the sheepfold, so becoming the gate itself. None could go out or in except when he let them. The sheep were protected by his very life.

Jesus says that he is this sort of shepherd, one for whom the true gatekeeper (God, our Father) opens up the way, so that He can lead out his sheep into the green pastures promised in their scriptures and psalms.

So, what is this new and abundant life that Jesus wants us to know and to enjoy?

This ‘new life’ is centred on our new relationship with God through Jesus and is itself **life-giving** – not just because Jesus gave his life for us, but because he rose from the dead and invites us to come in and share in his risen life. This is new life **in the here and now**, to be lived under his protection and care – for as well as being our way in, Jesus is also our Good Shepherd. This is a new **God-enabled transformative relationship** which means that, instead of being shut in by rules and ‘do nots’, we are able **to be fully our new selves before God** when we trust in Jesus.

This liberating message drew people to the early church. Here was a **place of wonder and joy**. Here, all were valued and cared for, and everyone was hungry to live this new life: a fact seen in all they shared... And many, we are told, saw just how **attractive** this new life was and joined them.

I wonder...

- Are you excited about the new life Christ offers?
- Is your hunger and gratitude for this new life seen in how you live your life today?

STF 565: Only by grace can we enter

**Only by grace can we enter,
Only by grace can we stand; Not by our
human endeavour, but by the blood of the Lamb.
Into your presence you call us, You call us to come.
Into your presence you draw us,
and now by your grace we come.**

*Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
who would stand? Thanks to your grace
we are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb (repeat)*

Only by grace...

*Gerit Gustafson
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A time of prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your desire to give us abundant life. Open our minds and hearts to what that means for us in our current circumstances and renew our wonder and joy, as we live in you.

Give us and all your world a new sense of joy, and also of your peace in these changing times. Help us to trust you for all that is, and all that is to come, as we pray for your church, our communities and the world you so love, in this time of uncertainty.

Today we especially pray for:

- **Those who cannot go out.** For those who are unwell or housebound, those who are held captive or imprisoned – and all who care for them.
- **For all who are shut inside themselves**, afraid or worried, in mourning, lonely or sad.
- **For those who live alongside danger**, thinking particularly of those living in war zones or areas where there is lawlessness.
- **For those who are unsafe at home.** We think of those suffering from domestic abuse in our towns and villages today and those living with the memory

of ill-treatment or abuse of any kind.

- **For those we care for and those who care for us.**

In all these places and people, we pray that your voice may be heard so that your Kingdom will come.

We pray too for your church, that we may be open to your Spirit's teaching and listen for your voice in all things. May we do all we can to enable your love to be known in all the places where you lead us. Most of all, may we rejoice in your presence with us no matter where we are today, or will be tomorrow.

We thank you Lord, that you hear all the prayers we lift to you in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

STF 481: 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 I will trust...***

**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... *And I will trust...***

Stuart Townend. © 1996 Thankyou Music

Blessing

May the blessing of God the Good Shepherd, God the risen Son and God the Holy Spirit be with you, and may he renew his life within you, today and evermore. **Amen.**

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