



### Opening Responses for Eastertide

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
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### 'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Do you find the image of Jesus as being the Good Shepherd helpful, or not? Why do you feel like that about it?

### Prayers of Thanks and Praise

Glory to you, O God:  
your raised Jesus from the grave,  
bringing us victory over death and giving us eternal life.

Glory to you, O Christ:  
for us and for our salvation you overcame death,  
and opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, O Holy Spirit:  
you lead us into the truth, show us the way,  
and breathe new life into us.

Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
now and forever. Amen

### Psalm of the Week – Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
**He makes me lie down in green pastures;**  
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.  
**He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.**  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;  
**for you are with me;**  
**your rod and your staff — they comfort me.**  
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 forever.**  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;  
**as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.**  
**Amen**

### Prayers of Renewal

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead,  
opening the way to everlasting life,  
both in the here-and-now, and throughout all that is to come.  
Let us therefore bring to God those things in need of renewal:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:  
**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:  
**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the failings and disunity of your Church:

**Restore us and heal us.**

*Silence is kept for a few moments...*

God of new beginnings,  
of love stronger than even death,  
you set us free from the past, to flourish in the future.  
Thank you that you forgive us, restore us,  
and breathe new life into us.

**Amen**

**Reading**     John 10:22 – 30

### **Sermon**

One of the most remarkable things in nature is seeing animals being able to locate their young in the midst of huge crowds, based on the call their offspring make. Recognising the voice of a person that we know well in the midst of a crowded space is an equivalent in human relationships, and that moment of recognition is both reassuring and joyful when the other person is someone that we know we can trust. When I was about six years-old, my dad and I were in Preston town centre looking around the shops. In my favourite video games store, I got so absorbed in browsing the titles that I did not realise Dad had already gone outside. I vividly remember being quite frightened, and so it was a huge relief when I heard him calling my name and I found him again. It taught me to be more careful, and not wander off when out and about; more importantly, it reminded me of how much I was

cared about, and that recognising my father's voice meant finding a secure and safe place to be.

Today's reading is the last segment of a three-part section of John's Gospel exploring Jesus being the Good Shepherd. To set the scene for us, Jesus had become embroiled in a really angry argument with a group of Pharisees who had objected to his healing of a blind man on the Sabbath day, resulting in that man being banished (9:1 – 34). Jesus tackled those religious leaders about their spiritual blindness, which prevented them from seeing the new thing God was enacting through him (9:35 – 41). From there, he began teaching about being both the shepherd, and the gate of the sheepfold (10:1 – 10), before declaring himself to be the Good Shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep (10:11 – 18). Drawing on this language was highly controversial, because it was normally reserved for God alone. The people of Israel knew that they were the sheep of God's pasture, as Psalm 79:13 puts it. Furthermore, the prophet Ezekiel had told them God was really angry with those shepherds who took advantage of, and abandoned, their sheep. God declared, "I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and will make them lie down, says the Lord God" (Ezekiel 34:11, 15). These images would've sprung to mind among a people who knew their scriptures well, and prompted a question that would have excited some, and scandalised others: was Jesus in fact God?

We know that those members of the Temple establishment who had been listening to Jesus were sharply divided by his words. Some of them were angry, declaring that he was 'out of his mind' and demon-possessed, so that he was best ignored. Others wondered how one who could open the eyes of the blind could possibly be those things. The teachings and actions of Jesus had again split opinion amongst his fellow Jewish leaders (10:19 – 21). In today's passage, and after an unknown time gap, the Festival of Dedication had brought Jesus to Jerusalem. Known as Hanukkah, this celebrated the rededication

of the Temple following its desecration by Antiochus IV, in 164 BCE; in other words, it focused attention on God's faithfulness toward the city and the wider region of Judea, in the face of oppression (10:22). Jesus' walking in the Portico of Solomon is also significant, because it was known as the 'Porch of Judgement', from which kings of Israel executed justice, thus revealing him as embodying the divine justice in his very being (10:23). While there, he was accosted by members of the Temple establishment who demanded to know whether or not he was indeed the Messiah, the successor of Solomon, come to set Israel free (10:24). His response offers the third explanation of what it meant for him to be the Good Shepherd at one with the Father.

Jesus began by pointing out both that he'd already told them plainly about who he was, but they didn't listen, and that the actions he had performed in the Father's name testified to his identity (10:25). That had not led to those sceptical listeners trusting in him, because they were among the sheep in the Good Shepherd's sheepfold, meaning they did not recognise his voice and follow him (10:26 – 27). For the sheep, Jesus had the power to grant eternal life and save them from perishing (10:28) because they were entrusted to him by the Father, and nothing could shatter their resulting identity in God (10:28 – 29). This was grounded, in a claim that inspiring murderous hate among those gathered in the Temple portico (10:31), in the oneness of God the Father and Jesus the Son (10:30). We can trust in him precisely because to look at Jesus is to glimpse the nature of God. As Michael Ramsey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, put it: 'God is Christlike, and in God, there is no un-Christlikeness at all'. When we recognise the voice of somebody who we know that we can trust, that moment of recognition is both reassuring and joyful. This is true of our fellow human beings, and this is also true of God. To be a disciple of Christ is to know the Good Shepherd's voice, and to follow him.

So, what does this mean for us today? Well, for me, today's reading offers a wonderful invitation to place our trust in Jesus Christ. God's

faithfulness comes through in this passage, which highlights the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Most of us know, sometimes from painful experience, that human beings may let one another down. Relationships can go wrong, and trust can be broken down. However, God's faithfulness is absolute and once we choose to enter freely the sheepfold of God, we will never be abandoned or discarded. When we look at Jesus, we look at God, and the portraits we find in the four Gospels reveal a God who is passionate and wild and loving, who lifts up those on the margins (such as the blind man whose healing triggered his conflict with the Pharisees), and who is constant and faithful whatever life throws at us. May you all find your place in the sheepfold of God, and know you are loved. Amen

### **Recommended Resource of the Week**

Kenneth Bailey's 2015 book *The Good Shepherd* looks at the image of the Good Shepherd and how it is used throughout the entire Bible from Psalm 23 onwards.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

#### **Lord's Prayer**

#### **Final Prayer – Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Easter**

Good Shepherd of the sheep,  
by whom the lost are sought and guided into the fold:  
feed us and we shall be satisfied;  
heal us and we shall be made whole;  
and lead us, that we may be with you;  
for you are alive and reign,  
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
One God, now and forever.

**Amen**

## **Blessing**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

May the blessing of God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
fill us with resurrection hope,  
and remain upon us and all whom we love and pray for,  
now and throughout eternity. **Amen**