

**The Diocese of Chester
Cycle of Prayer
Sunday, 25 April to Saturday, 22 May 2021**



Sunday, 25 April 2021

Fourth Sunday of Easter

The words are perturbing: 'The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.' We've heard them so often we don't actually hear them. It's not just that very few of us know anything about sheep or shepherds so we can't make the connections between the words and our experience of God easily. No doubt that's true. We actually can't hear this metaphor as our forebears would have heard it, let alone first-century Jews in Palestine. Maybe there is a case to translate it to something we could understand more easily: I am the good bus driver; I tell my passengers where to get off. I am the good HR manager; I sack myself first. I am the good neighbour; I never park across your house front. I think not.

No, the words should stay as they are, but we have to try to hear them anew. Some possibilities:

Does 'good' in Good Shepherd refer to 'good' in the sense of effective and capable? How can it? Surely the capable shepherd doesn't allow his sheep to get into the terrify place where the only option is their death or his? And what's efficient in the shepherd dying when the shepherd is so much more valuable than the sheep? If he survives, he can bring on a new flock – sheep left to their own devices won't be able to. Don't think me fanciful in raising this– Saint Augustine recognized the problem in the fourth century.

This isn't about capabilities. So, we can't take the image of shepherding and apply it to ourselves. There will be one shepherd, one alone (v 16). This is about the nature of Jesus himself. He is the 'Good' Shepherd as God is the shepherd in psalms 23 and 78. He is the model shepherd the prophet Ezekiel looked for (Ezekiel 34); the one who is not like the self-serving, ignoble and shameful leaders who exploit the flock that is the people Israel. Forget them – the only one to be trusted to shepherd with grace and mercy is the one who knows God's heart intimately, and Jesus said, 'just as the Father knows me and I know the Father' (v.15). Jesus it is who embodies this quality of good, and no one else. Jesus it is who acts as the Father acts, and no one else.

We are to surrender ourselves to this good shepherd, and this good shepherd alone. We are all in this together. And the shock is that we don't know who else is in this flock. He will shepherd all who respond to his voice. One flock; one shepherd. As that great missionary bishop Lesslie Newbigin put it, 'There is no other good shepherd, no other who can lead the entire human family into fullness of life, except him who laid down his life for all.' The unity of the Church and the unity of humanity cannot be separated from each other. The Church's unity is a sign and foretaste of humanity's unity. We are all in this together. All of a sudden this talk of a flock isn't as churchy as we thought it to be and the Good Shepherd isn't an example of our human capabilities.

The Nippon Sei Ko Kai

Monday, 26 April 2021
St Mark (transferred)

Chester Deanery

Brasília, Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil

Tuesday, 27 April 2021

0201 Ashton Hayes

C: Phillip Weston. LM: Alan Downen, Philip Goodall, Margaret Papworth.

Pray that our newly re-ordered church building will enable us to introduce new ministries and mission events that will grow our congregation.

Brazzaville, Province de L'Eglise Anglicane Du Congo

Wednesday, 28 April 2021

0202 Barrow

C: Andy Stinson. LM: June Willis.

Risen Lord Jesus, you are the hope of the world and our salvation;

Deepen our trust in you

Walk with our community as we return to worship in person,

be our comfort as we care for one another, particularly those who are vulnerable

give us wisdom to live in step with your creation

and be our vision as we seek to build your Kingdom in Barrow.

Barrow CofE School.

Brechin, The Scottish Episcopal Church

Thursday, 29 April 2021

0203 Chester St John the Baptist

C: David Chesters. LM: Keith Allen.

Brisbane, The Anglican Church of Australia

Friday, 30 April 2021

0204 Chester Holy Trinity Without-the-Walls (Blacon)

C: Tina Upton, Louise Annison, Christopher Burkett. LM: Sarah Dutton.

Pray for wisdom in decisions about reopening parts of our outreach project after months of closure, so that our links across the community can bear fruit in many turning to Christ. Also, for everything to run smoothly this summer, during the Rector's sabbatical.

Bristol, The Church of England

Saturday, 1 May 2021

Ss Philip and James

0205 Chester St Mary Without-the-Walls (Handbridge)

C: Ric Whaite, Laura Rhodes. LM: Linda Manning.

O Holy Spirit, giver of light and life,
impart to us thoughts better than our own thoughts,
and prayers better than our own prayers,
and powers better than our own powers,
that we may spend and be spent
in the ways of love and goodness,
after the perfect image of our Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ.

Eric Milner-White, 1884-1964, and G. W. Briggs, 1875-1959

Overleigh St Mary's CofE School.

British Columbia, The Anglican Church of Canada

Sunday, 2 May 2021

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Given the geography of our country it is too easy to think of this vine image as referring to something that is terribly fragile, difficult to maintain, needing lots of effort, exotic, and in need of protection. Those are the last things a vine is in its home habitat. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea and the Psalmist all use the image of the vine, and the picture almost always

is of degeneration in the sense of unruly growth. Vines grow with a vigour that is simply stunning.

Jesus takes this common image of a common thing and turns the metaphor, rampant growth here isn't the wild ramblings of a briar, the hedge that runs amok. No here, the new growth, the different growth, is reaching out, it is shooting spurts, not in disarray, although that's how it might seem, but in fruitful hope. Yes, it goes in all directions, it won't easily be constrained in its search for sun and water and nutrients. As long as it's connected somewhere to the core, that's enough. On a vine the fruit is always on the new growth. So often I hear the image of the vine used in a constraining way, defining the plant in a neat topiary, its margins clipped and uniform. But the vine grows on, defying our well-ordered logic, chasing away towards the sun, eager to produce what is sweet, and abundant with life. Get the Jesus emphasis in the picture.

In comparing himself to a vine in today's gospel reading, our Lord is working with an image which was a very familiar one to the Israelite nation. This comparison had been drawn so often that the vine had become the symbol of the Jewish nation and was even the emblem which was stamped on the coins of the Maccabees. The picture was so familiar, but Jesus turns it with a new emphasis.

When the symbol of the vine is used in the scriptures, it invariably has a negative tone. Isaiah and Jeremiah both use it to berate the people for not obeying the word of God and for falling from the high moral standards which God had set for them. In essence, the vine has grown wild and is in desperate need of pruning or cleansing. But Jesus is saying that the only thing that can save is to be joined to him. Jesus was setting forth the principal that the way to salvation was through faith in him, and not through heritage or simple growth.

The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem & The Middle East

Monday, 3 May 2021

0206 Chester St Paul with St Luke

C: Chris Blunt. LM: Jennifer Gilbertson, Su Ogunyemi, John Somerville, Keith Taggart, Marion Watts, Sylvia Walley.

Please pray for the practicalities of doing things in new ways ... and overcoming the glitches! As we reopen, our services are parallel in church and online (so pray for smooth tech!), our community cafe should be housed in a marquee, and the parent and baby group has never been more popular (since it ran through the lockdown). Pray that church/ community connections may translate into people pointed towards the love of Jesus.

Central Buganda, The Church of the Province of Uganda

Tuesday, 4 May 2021

0207 Christleton

C: Stefan Collier, Rob Croft.

West Buganda, The Church of the Province of Uganda

Wednesday, 5 May 2021

0208 Dodleston

C: Hazel Clarke.

Pray for Churchwardens and PCC and for all who minister here that our parish will find growth and healing in Jesus after an extraordinary year.

Dodleston CofE School.

Buhiga, The Anglican Church of Burundi

Thursday, 6 May 2021

0209 Eccleston & Pulford

C: Roger Clarke. LM: Bob Hughes.

Eccleston CofE School.

Bujumbura, The Anglican Church of Burundi

Friday, 7 May 2021

0210 Guilden Sutton

C: Heather Carty. LM: Denise Campbell, Pauline Holgate, Libby Owen.

Guilden Sutton CofE School.

Bukavu, Province de L'Eglise Anglicane Du Congo

Saturday, 8 May 2021

0211 Hoole

C: Vacant, Sam Durdant-Hollamby. LM: Vicki Bulgin, Bill Holt, Tina Trevett, Jeff Turnbull, Emma Smith.
Hoole CofE School.

Bukedi, The Church of the Province of Uganda

Sunday, 9 May 2021

Sixth Sunday of Easter

'One potato, two potatoes, three potatoes, four.

Five potatoes, six potatoes, seven potatoes, more.'

Do you remember that sinking feeling when your first fist was knocked out with that rhyme, and then the second! 'A classic simple choosing rhyme' as it's described on Google – but there was nothing simple or classic about the feelings it provoked in me aged 8 years! I wanted to be chosen, and I wasn't. Again, and again I wasn't. Not chosen. A dismal experience.

Who's in, who's out? The Jewish Christian believers were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been given to infidel Gentiles. 'They are out, we are in. It cannot be that God's gifts are poured out on them. We're the ones chosen – nah, ne-nah, ne-nah, nah. Peter, you've got to be mistaken.'

But then they saw and heard it for themselves: God's spirit poured out even on the Gentiles. The blessings they had received, the others received also. Who's in, and who's out here? The ones we had thought 'out' are included 'in' by God's actions.

God includes; God chooses in a wide and inclusive way that is an affront to the boundaries we find so conducive. We think ourselves 'in' and the consequence of that is our dismissal of others as 'out.' But God will have none of that. The purpose of his choosing of his people is that other people should know themselves chosen also. You're all in. Know this disarming truth: God does not exclude. His grace extends to all.

The Anglican Church of Kenya

Monday, 10 May 2021

0213 Kelsall

C: Susan Banks, Karen Andrews. LM: John Diggle.

Bunbury, The Anglican Church of Australia

Tuesday, 11 May 2021

0214 Lache cum Saltney

C: Hennie Johnston, Simon Chesters, Hana Helvadjan, Anina Thomas. LM: Nikki Smith.

Our parish would appreciate prayer for our on going 'faith building project.' We are looking at building a glass hub around the front of the church to provide a cafe for the local community. Also for discernment as we plan to plant a place of worship in the new housing development off Wrexham Road, Chester.

Bungoma, The Anglican Church of Kenya

Wednesday, 12 May 2021

0215 Plemstall

C: Heather Carty. LM: Pauline Holgate, Libby Owen.

Bunyoro-Kitara, The Church of the Province of Uganda

Thursday, 13 May 2021

Ascension Day

0216 Tarvin

C: Adam Friend, Barbara King. LM: Mary Burgess, Ron Fuller, Colin Haworth, Jo Richards.

Duddon St Peter's CofE School.

Busan, The Anglican Church of Korea

Friday, 14 May 2021

St Matthias

0217 Upton-by-Chester

C: Paul Newman, David O'Brien. LM: Barbara Capstick.

Upton Heath CofE School.

Saturday, 15 May 2021

0218 Plas Newton

C: Pete Rugen. LM: Christine Blackmore, David Blackmore, Julie Ellison, Rob Kophamel, Alison Linfield, Alan Lowe, Sas McConville, Trevor Park.

Central Busoga, The Church of the Province of Uganda

Sunday, 16 May 2021

Seventh Sunday of Easter

The believers wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and waiting is always so hard. They do what we might expect devout people to do – they pray, regularly and according to the Jewish traditions in which they had been brought up. They prayed but they also rolled dice. When it came to the decision about who should take the place of the disciple who had proved false – after the praying they decided on the person by the casting of lots. Prayer and the throw of a dice!

We might try to rationalize this. ‘Oh,’ we say, ‘they did as their forebears often did when choices were hard – casting lots, deciding by chance draw.’ Perhaps, but this is the only such occasion recorded in the whole of the New Testament, so I wonder whether there isn’t something more profound going on here than a mere reversion to ancient practices. Might there not be something here that reflects their general unease with the way they have all behaved as disciples; that suggests they aren’t as sure of themselves and their own capabilities as they once were?

Faithfulness doesn't mean we get it right all of the time. God alone is the only one who can judge our intentions at their profoundest level. That's what I take from the casting of lots for the replacement twelfth disciple – the eleven all knew that their own judgement was flawed in many ways, so they sought a way of choosing beyond themselves.

God calls each of us to be a witness to his resurrection, that is, to prove to the world by the way we live that he is alive. Not just alive in the world, but alive in us. That's about choices, and faithfulness, and integrity. Sometimes the choices are beyond us; sometimes our confidence decays to dust; sometimes it's hard to even trust ourselves. We worry that we too will dismally say ‘If things had been different ...’ But there is one who calls and trusts, who heals and restores, who prays for us. And in whose calling of us we should take heart. Wait and trust – the Holy Spirit will be given to us.

The Anglican Church of Korea

Monday, 17 May 2021

0219 Chester Christ Church

C: Graham Shaw, Glyn Jones, Ralph Kemp, Anna Leyden. LM: Veronica Johnston.
At Christ Church, as well as all the normal prayers around helping people recover from their experience of lockdown and Covid, we'd like continued prayer for our work with students and young adults, as they navigate formative years.

Butare, Eglise Anglicane du Rwanda

Tuesday, 18 May 2021

0220 Chester St Oswald & St Thomas of Canterbury

C: Stephen Sheridan.
Chester Blue Coat CofE School.

Butere, The Anglican Church of Kenya

Wednesday, 19 May 2021

0221 Chester St Peter

C: Jon Phillips, Michael Leyden, Gareth Thomas. LM: Cath Jones.
Please pray for St Peter's at the Cross as we seek to fulfil our vision of seeing the city of Chester transformed by God's love! We are a network of communities and our CORE mission (Communities, Outreach, Relationships and Events for Unity) is close to our hearts and we are excited to see what God is going to do as Chester comes out of lockdown! Please also pray for our Cafe: Cafe at the Cross which should be reopening on Tuesday 18th May!

Buye, The Anglican Church of Burundi

Thursday, 20 May 2021

The Bishops' Blue Coat CofE High School

Byumba, Eglise Anglicane du Rwanda

Friday, 21 May 2021

Grosvenor Park CofE Academy

Calabar, The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)

Saturday, 22 May 2021

Chadkirk Deanery

Calcutta, The (united) Church of North India
