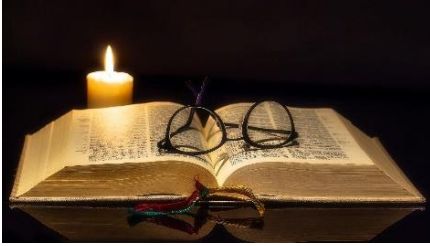


# 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021

## The paper-version Service



**To Begin:** Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service set out below.

**Opening Prayer:** Holy Father, Good Shepherd, thank you for the safe home and protection you offer us. Forgive when we stray away and help us to hear your voice and return to you. May we feed in your green pastures and drink from your clear water that we might be restored body, mind, and soul. May we receive gratefully the fulness of life you offer and freely share this life and love with all that you lead us to. **Amen.**

### **Song:**

Worthy of every song we could ever sing  
Worthy of all the praise we could ever bring  
Worthy of every breath we could ever breathe  
We live for you

*Holy, there is no one like you  
There is none besides you  
Open up my eyes in wonder  
And show me who you are and fill me  
With your heart and lead me  
In your love to those around me*

Jesus, the name above every other name  
Jesus, the only one who could save  
Worthy of every breath we could ever breathe  
We live for you  
Oh, we live for you,

### **Bridge:**

And I will build my life upon your love,  
it is a firm foundation  
And I will put my trust in you alone  
And I will not be shaken (rpt)

*Holy, there is no one like you...*

**Read: John 10:1-21 – God knows me**

*A summary of the talk given by Rob Hughes.*

From the moment I embraced faith I became a 'searcher'. I lived with the unquenchable thirst to know more of God. I still do, but in a different way. I see, looking back, that faith does not affect everyone in the same way. I realise we are all different - which can be irritating when you're trying to communicate what or who you think Jesus is - when sometimes it all seems so obvious to you.

And that's what I see under the words of today's reading. Only, here it's Jesus who is trying to explain the unexplainable ... to people who can probably never be completely on his 'wave-length'. Not in this life anyway. And the trouble is people who believe they have all the answers resent anyone who tells them they have it wrong.

I love what I think I have learned from God. I even love that I cannot know it all. I love Jesus - who I can know with rather more certainty. But when it comes to knowing, for me, now, things are 'the other way up.' It matters more how much God knows about me. What I know seems almost irrelevant! I hear in what I've just said an echo of psalm 139 - which I love. If it's not already familiar to you, take a look.

In today's scripture there are several striking verses.

First, I think, should come Jesus' sayings: 'I am the shepherd' (verse 14) and 'I am the gate' (verse 7). The whole point of a shepherd is to care for a flock - to protect them, to provide for all their needs. Shepherding is not an intellectual pursuit, and not so much a job as a vocation. In the ancient roots of the word 'shepherd' lies the idea of caring - even to the point of self-sacrifice.

You see, the word 'care' (v13) means 'caring' as a close companion 'cares', a real friend, a provider and protector, someone who takes the deepest pleasure in your well-being. These are the intimate values of love. And the 'gate'? Well let's think about it. Gates come only with enclosures. And the point of enclosures is to collect and hold, to protect, defend or to separate things with distinctive value, from other things. And, it has to be said and acknowledged some things are not entirely safe outside an enclosure! So this shepherd and gate language is fundamentally about safety.



Jesus says: 'I know my sheep'. And did you notice in verse 16 he says he has sheep 'not of this sheep pen'? We

usually assume he is distinguishing Jews from Christians. But on what grounds? He could just as easily mean he has other 'sheep' that only he can recognise. (What does that say to us about inclusiveness and church?) He knows me. But he knows everyone else, too - everyone.

Jesus also says: 'My sheep know me' (verse 14). And I find that strangely unsettling. Why? Because we do not know we already know him until we 'experience' his call. He enters gently into some people's consciousness. Yet startles others into sudden recognition. Something in our natures makes that connection.



Did you hear wonderful verse 8! Jesus says: 'All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers but the sheep did not listen to them.' First that's frightening ... then it comes as relief. For these days more than enough people tell you what to think - impose their views - sometimes by clandestine means; attempt to subvert or seduce. But Jesus says that when we are safely in the fold we will

take no notice of them. They are wasting their breath! But, as I smile at this, I continue to remember the importance of discernment.

Jesus' accusers had come to their own scandalous interpretations of faith. They would not try to understand Jesus. In the previous chapter John introduced us to people convinced that illness serves God's purposes (v 9:2); to leaders who have decided for God what we can and cannot do on 'days of rest' (v9:16); and to many who rejected the evidence of their own eyes (v9:20). And to cap it all, we heard people who'd taken it upon themselves to decide who should or should not be allowed to join them in worship (v9:22).

So it's easy to see why Jesus would tell them about shepherds and gates. For it's clear they believed he knew nothing about them and less than them about God. So they were simply unwilling to listen. But nothing since then has changed Jesus' truths. He knows us like a potter knows his pots. He made us.

For two millennia his followers have taken great comfort from this Gospel. The intimacy and strength of Jesus' unflinching friendship is unmatched. But it's a relationship in which nothing about us is hidden. And unlike the people in this scripture, we are listening.

**Prayers:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* (Philippians 4:4-6)



- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, for neighbours, for family and friends.
- Pray for the Church.

**Collect: 10<sup>th</sup> after Trinity:** Let your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**



**The Lord's Prayer:** Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

**Blessing** to be declared over yourselves, COGS, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

**The Notices:** We are now holding ticketed and socially distanced services in the building on Sundays at 9.30am. Further information on our website or by ringing our vicar, Howard.

If you know of others who would like to receive this, or you would rather not receive it; or if you find yourself isolated and not able to get neighbours, friends, or family to help, then ring Howard, 01420 563344.

