

Service on a Sheet – 22nd November 2020.

Lectionary Readings for today: Ezekiel 34: 11-16+; Ephesians 1: 15-23; Matthew 25: 31-48

'I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered sheep when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep.' [Ezekiel 34: 11, 12]

Call to worship: I do apologise if the Service on a Sheet for last week didn't really hold together well ... I had had a week that included three days of a migraine headache – I don't get them very often but when they do strike, they are rather vicious to say the least! I'm fine now though – normal service is resumed – or what passes for normal these days! I would also like to use this space to remind you that next Sunday (29th November) sees us on the first Sunday of Advent. I know Advent rings are still being placed in churches in anticipation of us being able to use them at some point but I will also be doing a sheet each week to journey us through Advent. As this will start next Sunday can I suggest you start to gather 5 tea lights or candles or similar and you will, as the weeks progress, need other items as well. You may like to create a small space for your Advent ring perhaps large enough to hold your candles or tea lights safely and to give space to some other small items. Each week, in addition to the Service on a Sheet, will be an Advent reflections sheet – one for each day with a prayer for lighting the candle for that week which, should we be able to do so, can be used in church as well as home. There is no obligation for you to join in but if you wish to journey slightly differently this year here is a chance.



Prayers:

- Give thanks to God for the beauty that still surrounds us as leaves are slow to fall from the trees this year.
- Give thanks to God for the small firms and businesses who are diversifying to deliver meals and supplies to homes.
- Give thanks that we have a God who understands us so fully.
- Ask forgiveness for the times you have got impatient with circumstances or allowed them to overwhelm you.
- Give thanks that God is the one who promises to be with us through all of life's ups and downs and even offers to share the burden if we feel it is too much.

'Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory cascades through life in overflowing grace, to tell creation's meaning in the story of love evolving love from time and space.' [Singing the Faith 3]

Lord's Prayer

The image of the shepherd was a common theme throughout the Bible and a common sight to the people whose lives we follow through the pages of Scripture. The flocks of sheep and goats who provided milk plus fleece and, later, meat, were allowed to roam freely over the hillsides and plains surrounding towns and villages. They were tended by shepherds who ensured the flocks had the best pasture and water available, were moved to stop over grazing and were kept an eye on as both sheep and goats were prone to wander at will and open to attack from wild animals or foraging humans.

Being a shepherd was labour intensive with little time for rest or relaxation except towards the end of the day when shepherds might meet up to split the night watch of their flocks between them.

The Israelites were frequently referred to as the sheep of God and God described as the Shepherd of the flock. A both comforting and disturbing image. Comforting in that it suggests the reassurance of a God with an ever-watchful eye on the people and wanting the very best for them to thrive and grow. Disturbing in that it intimates that the people are prone to wandering away from the shepherd and getting into trouble or places of danger.

- Does the idea of God as the Shepherd of your life comfort or disturb you?
- Why is that the case for you?

Jesus takes on and expands this idea of the shepherd of the sheep and the mixed flocks that were a common sight around the communities he passed through. He is talking about the end of time as we know it when God will come and separate the people, just as the sheep and goats had to be separated come market time or to go to their proper homes when the colder days came and the flocks had to be cared for within the towns rather than on the open hillsides.

He continues his thinking around what is the sort of behaviour that God would expect and does expect from those who would be called children of God. To feed and clothe the needy, to refresh the thirsty, to offer shelter, care and a general acceptance and understanding that those around us day by day are people just like ourselves with needs and worries and anxieties, not aliens from another planet!

It is very easy to go through life without really seeing what is happening under our noses – to ignore the huddled shapes in shop doorways, the starving faces on the news bulletins, to feel compassion fatigue at yet another fund-raising telethon. If nothing else the pandemic has raised our awareness of the way in which all of society is interconnected, businesses need custom and staff, staff need jobs and finance, families need food and clothing and a roof over their head. It has also highlighted the problems of domestic abuse, and substance abuse as well as shown the ‘don’t care’ or ‘I’m alright Jack!’ attitude of many who don’t see that they have any role or responsibility to play in improving the lot for all.

It is also very easy to overlook what we could call the ‘unsung heroes’ of everyday life. the quiet ones who bring tins to Foodbanks, who think to recycle through charity shops and bags and the use of brown bins, who reach out to offer a shoulder and tissues to the upset and sit quietly alongside those who are struggling. They are not seen, they are not named, but the impact they have on the lives of others is tremendous.

- Who are the unnamed heroes of your life – those who have quietly set an example or made a difference to you?
- Who are goats in your mind? Those who ignore the needs of others in your eyes but, beware, remember when you point the finger at others, there are three more fingers pointing back at you!

Finally, we find a beautiful prayer for the people of the early church – one I would not be sorry to have prayed for me – perhaps you feel the same! A prayer for open eyes, to be able to see the glory and power of God, wisdom and revelation to know God better and God’s power to lead us forward and onward in him.

- Is this the sort of prayer you would like to have prayed for you? Why or why not?

Prayers:

- We bring to God the pain and confusion of our world remembering those most in need at this time.
- We bring to God those who are facing health problems and those who have lost someone precious to them.
- We bring to God those who are seeking to bring comfort and healing, in some small way, to others through their everyday lives.
- We remember before God our small businesses and those anxious about whether they will have a job to return to and those who are now having to seek employment.
- We bring to God ourselves – for all manner of reasons – seeking God’s blessing, wisdom, healing, strength and guidance.

‘When in the night I sleepless lie, my mind with heavenly thoughts supply; let no ill dreams disturb my rest, no powers of darkness me molest’ [Singing the Faith 142 v5]

Blessing: *‘I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance to his holy people and his incomparably great power for us who believe.’ [Ephesians 1: 17-19]*

Bedlington Colliery – if you would like to make a financial contribution to the toys for children who may otherwise not get a gift this Christmas Leanne is more than happy to accept monetary contributions as she distributes the Service on a Sheet each week or money can be sent to Sheila the Treasurer.