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EASTER 4B

25th April 2021

A short act of worship for use in peoples homes while churches are closed.

A Free resource part funded by



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Call to Worship

Living God, come amongst us again this day.
As we worship, as we sing, as we pray, as we listen,
Move amongst us by your Spirit, O God. Amen.¹

Hymn: 20 STF Be Still - [YouTube](#)

Opening Prayers

Creator God, Great shepherd of the sheep, we praise you.
As members of your flock, we thank you for the wonderful way you surround us with your love. With all your children throughout the world, we praise you.
Loving Lord, we rejoice that you have guided us through the pandemic to this moment. You are the shepherd who never neglects the flock for a second; the shepherd who handles his foolish and stubborn sheep with infinite patience and carries all those who struggle or despair.
Holy Spirit, give us your strength and courage, fill us with your peace as we worship
Fill us with your joy as we listen
Fill us with your hope as we pray
And may your worship always fill our lives.
Holy God, we confess that we do get it wrong and have sometimes strayed from your ways just like lost sheep. We have often been selfish and too concerned with getting our own way; we have failed to follow you and we are sorry. Help us to see ourselves as you see us and help us to hand our lives over to you. Speak directly to each one of us the word of pardon and forgiveness. We know how much you love each one of us and we are so sorry when we let you down.
We ask this prayer in the Name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen
Here is good news. Jesus says, 'Your sins are forgiven'. Amen.

Thanks be to God.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Acts 4: 5-12 - [Click for Reading](#)
1 John 3:16-24 - [Click for Reading](#)
John 10:11-18 - [Click for Reading](#)

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Diane Robinson

Reflections on the Readings

When I was about seven years old, I remember my mother pointing something out to me while we were on a car journey and I answered in just two words, 'I know'... I also remember that she went on to say, very gently, that it wasn't polite to say, 'I know'. Ever since then I have been cautious of saying, 'I know' but there are times when we do need to ask ourselves what we know to be true, even if we are careful about how we express our knowledge!

Throughout our lives we are searching for knowledge – knowledge of how the universe works and how we can best protect the planet; knowledge about how numbers work and how to manage our finances; knowledge about the journey of humanity to this point in history and how politics shapes our society. In the past year probably most of us have learnt more than we ever expected to about how to mute ourselves in a Zoom call or create a video of a bible passage or form a family group on social media. In a situation where we don't know much we feel vulnerable, isolated, stupid; gaining knowledge helps us to gain confidence, authority, security. Three of today's bible passages mention knowing, most explicitly in John chapter 10 where Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd and goes on to say, in verses 14 and 15, 'I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.' Here, as so often in the bible, 'knowing' means much more than whether or not we can retain a particular fact, such as the date of the Battle of Hastings or who scored the winning goal in the Cup Final, this sort of knowledge is a deep knowledge born of love and commitment.

This kind of knowledge is transformative, perhaps even vital to living a full life. In our own lives, are we aware of this sort of knowledge in our relationships? Some of us may have close family or friends who do seem to know us well, to anticipate how we will react to events, to express their love for us in just the right way at just the right time. Not all of us have such relationships, and one of the loneliest experiences in life is to feel that no-one else knows or understands you.

These words of Jesus speak directly to all of us, reminding us that, whatever our human relationships may be, there is One who knows us. 'I know my own and my own know me', Jesus insists. His words were probably shaped by the beautiful psalm appointed for today, 'The Lord is my Shepherd' – an image which has supported, comforted and strengthened people for thousands of years.

Jesus maintains that the shepherd knows his sheep. To many of us, sheep are sheep; if shown a flock of sheep, we would be hard pressed to recognise individual sheep from amongst the crowd. To a shepherd, each sheep is an individual – the shepherd was there when that little lamb was born and remembers whether it was easy or traumatic; the shepherd has had to go hunting for that particular ewe and bring it back to the fold; the shepherd knows that when it is feeding time one greedy ram needs to be kept back lest he push others out of the way. Every individual characteristic is known to the shepherd, who uses that knowledge to enable the sheep to live as fully as possible, both as an individual sheep and as a member of the flock.

So is all of that also true of how Jesus knows, loves and cares for us? Yes, that seems to be what Jesus is saying – isn't that wonderful news! News which brings

with it a natural response; *'I know my sheep and my sheep know me'*. Do we? Or do we feel a bit less sure about that second part of the verse? Maybe all of us need to learn to be more like sheep, dependent on our shepherd and sticking close to him, rather than wanting to be the sheepdog, snapping at the heels of others and directing operations! Part of our knowing the shepherd is about recognising God's voice amidst the many voices making demands on us.

Jesus contrasts himself as the good shepherd with hired hands who are not as invested in the sheep as the shepherd. That is the test. When we hear voices in society pulling us one way or another, can we step back and ask ourselves whether those voices really have our best interests at heart, or whether they are motivated by self-interest? The voice of the shepherd is the voice who wants the best for us, whatever the cost to himself.

In the first letter of John the writer picks up that same idea, reminding those reading the letter that God in Jesus 'laid down his life for us' for God is the one who is 'greater than our hearts', who 'knows everything'. Again this love inevitably calls for a response from us - we, in turn, demonstrate our love for others in truth and action.

In this Easter season, we celebrate that our Good Shepherd, Jesus, who laid down his life for us, did not stay dead for long. Jesus was raised from death by the power of God. That was the good news preached by the earliest Christians, many of whose experiences are told in the Acts of the Apostles. In chapter 4 we hear how Peter and John have just healed a crippled beggar and have now been arrested for teaching and proclaiming that in Jesus there is resurrection of the dead. Many have heard, believed and joined the growing movement of 'followers of the Way'.

As they are interrogated by the rulers, elders and scribes, Peter and John are asked in whose name or by what power they are preaching and healing. Peter has no hesitation in declaring, 'let it be known to all of you...that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead'. The wonderful, transformative, personal, even intimate knowledge which Peter and John have of Jesus, after spending three years at his side, now spreads out through their ministry and they want everyone, even those who set themselves up as enemies of Jesus, to know that name and to receive what Jesus offers.

Peter and John have experienced the wholeness, the salvation, which comes from knowing that name and they are now the ones willing to take risks and to lay down their lives in order that others too may come to that same knowledge. They have understood what it means to be in this amazing two-way relationship with Jesus, where Jesus knows them and they know him. What a remarkable invitation that is – it's a bit like the way in which Jesus and God know each other, Jesus says, it's that close.

In a world of increasing anxiety, uncertainty and change, the words of Jesus speak into our hearts, we are known and loved. In response we are invited to get to know

Jesus as our closest friend, our Saviour, Shepherd and constant companion. Just like the sheep with the shepherd, that means sticking close, tuning our ears to recognise the voice of Jesus, being prepared to follow rather than go our own way,

accepting the provision Jesus offers us instead of trying to be independent. As the prophet Hosea expresses it in a beautiful verse (6:3): 'Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.' Amen.³

What are you being called to?

In the Bible there are many examples of administrative skills being put to good use. You might start searching for them in the stories of Moses and Jethro, Joseph, Nehemiah, Ezra, the Deacons and the life of the early church.

Which of these administrative skills have you used? Have you ever considered them to be part of your vocation and ministry?

[You might like to discuss this question in small groups, or invite people to write a list].

Let us pray.

Lord God, there are so many people in the Bible who serve you in small and quiet ways. We thank you for all your people in our church who serve you in small and quiet ways.

We thank you for the people in this Christian community who have the gifts of organising and administration – thank you for those who use these gifts in paid work, who use these gifts in church life, who use these gifts in their families. Thank you for the wisdom that comes from these people. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

This prayer invites you to pray through Psalm 23 as a prayer of intercession.

[You could use the [Vine Video of these prayers](#)].

The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.

Dear Lord, you are not just my shepherd but a good shepherd to all in the world. You give us all and more than we need and can ever want. May this abundance be a reality for many today in our world.

He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

For those who are in desert seasons and living through difficult moments in their life we pray that you might quench their thirst and give them peace that surpasses all understanding.

He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honour to his name.

³ Reflection written by Jill Baker

We pray particularly for all those leaders who feel weak, physically, mentally or spiritually. May you give them wisdom and strength in their time of need so that they each might bring you honour through their actions.

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

We pray for those who live in fear and with an anxious soul. May your Spirit comfort so that they might know of your closeness.

In a moment of silence we name someone that we ask you to comfort and protect at this time.

[Pause]

You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honour me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.

For those facing trials and situations this week that seem impossible. Anoint our lives with your grace and Spirit, and cause my cup to spill over with blessings, for the benefit of others.

Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

We pray that your unfailing love might flow out from this place today so that lives will be transformed. Amen.⁴

Hymn: 440 STF Amazing Grace - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

Go out, with love in your hearts,
And may we be agents of change in your world,
A people who make resurrection a reality, today.
Amen.⁵

⁴ Prayers of intercession written by Matthew Forsyth

⁵ Additional prayers by Tim Baker