

Sunday 3rd May 2020 Livestreamed, Grahamstown 9.30 a.m.		4th Sunday of Easter Good Shepherd Sunday Day 38 of COVID19 lockdown
Acts 2:42-47	Ps 23	1 Peter 2:19-25
		John 10:1-10
Jesus our Good Shepherd		

“The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing”
(Psalm 23:1).

We gather once again in what is becoming familiar ground: not in the much-loved sacred space of the Cathedral, or your own parish churches, but live streamed via Facebook, from the Cory Room into your homes.

Many thanks to all who are increasingly involved in these live streamed acts of worship. Our life in Christ, as people of praise and prayer, continues. It is so good also to see that a number of people are joining in with our twice-daily Morning and Evening Prayer, also live streamed. And I am valuing the opportunity to share a brief voice note reflection with many of you, on our whatsapp group. This is currently being sent out five days a week, from Sunday to Thursday – though I dropped the ball this last Thursday, when I ran out of steam! My apologies! If you would like to be added to that group, please let me know. It is only the touch of a cell phone button away!

It is good to recognise that our life in Christ is not limited to Facebook. The Cathedral, together with Food4Futures and the Circle of Unity, is part of the growing network here in Grahamstown Makhanda, providing food parcels and food vouchers to those who need. Thank you to all who have donated to this, and to all who have assisted with packing food parcels, and delivering them to the needy. With the clampdown on central handout points, we hope more and more to be delivering to local areas, or street blocks, in the weeks ahead. The need is great. Let's do what we can.

SCRIPTURES

The 4th Sunday of Easter (today) is known as Good Shepherd Sunday. It has as our gospel focus the words of Jesus, "I am the good shepherd."

Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing. He will make me lie down in green pastures and lead me beside still waters..." (Psalm 23:1-2).

1 Peter 2:19f, 25 "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps...you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls".

John 10: "I am the good shepherd... The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out..."

I am sure we are familiar with the two main images of the shepherd. The first, of course, is that the Lord is our good shepherd, ever vigilant, watching over us, guiding us. Our relationship with the Lord as our good shepherd is one of trust in God's provision and care for us.

Then there is the image of the shepherd as the leader, the shepherd, of God's people. In the Old Testament, the shepherds were the prophets, the priests and the kings of the nation; in the New Testament, the shepherds are those who care for and lead the people of God, the church. Shepherds as leaders are called to vision and look ahead, to see what is coming, and to respond accordingly.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Let's stay with that image of shepherds as leaders, for a few moments.

This past week I saw shepherds in a different role. We are used to shepherds in a formal sense: the obvious authority figures in church or state, appointed or elected into positions of leadership and authority. These I saw were not those. Instead, they were informal, those who have emerged during this time of crisis as leaders, taking the initiative, caring, building networks, reaching out; putting lists together, buying provisions, packing food parcels, driving all over town, finding the needy, doing what they can. Going the extra mile.

And among them were a number of our local pastors, clergy, religious sisters. Shepherds of the flock. Caring and doing what needs to be done. Getting their hands dirty like everyone else. Covered with dust. Getting tired. But part of a team. Leading by example. Helping to carry the load. Serving. Washing feet. Shepherds.

The good shepherd, Jesus tells us, knows his flock by name. What does that mean for me? For us? Normally, it means our parish roll. Our parish cycle of prayer. Our birthday lists. The names of people at the communion rail or at the West Door of the Cathedral after church.

But now during this time of covid and lock down, those lists, those names, take on another form. They are the lists, pages and pages, of those in need. Names and addresses. Households. People crying out for help. Names on a list, but each name a person, a family, asking for help. Human beings. Parents. Children. Names. The shepherd knows them by name.

During this time of covid, we are getting to know people by name. not merely “the needy” but “that group of people in Sun City: or the people in Hooggenoeg, or in Xolani, or in Hlalani, or Extension 10, or at the gate of the deanery. Lists, names, people. Faces. Eyes. Hopes. Needs. Hunger. The good shepherd knows them by name.

And linked to this is the picture of the life of the New

Testament church (Acts 2:42-47). We are given a glimpse, at grass-roots level, of a caring Christian community: the people of God, gathered around the teaching of the apostles, the breaking of bread and the prayers – and forming a quite remarkable new, alternative way of life: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45).

That is what has been happening here in Makhanda (Grahamstown) these past few weeks. Acts of generosity, of love, of compassion. People offering up their time, their resources. Helping those in need. How remarkable that we are seeing this right now, here in our midst. Is this a new beginning for us all?

AND SO...

The Covid pandemic has not only forced us to change the way we normally conduct our lives, at every level. It has also highlighted the huge inequalities in our society. Many are hoping that the changes forced on us – especially increased support for the very poor, and educational resources being made available across the board – will become permanent, and not simply a short-term response. My sense is that the government is using this crisis to bring about much-needed and longed-for changes in our society. And it is an eye-opener to hear that, with the ban on the sale of alcohol, the levels of violence have dropped

sharply. Our hospitals are no longer full of alcohol-fuelled casualties.

The need for food aid is growing. Here in Makhanda (Grahamstown), civil society efforts to provide food in the form of vouchers and parcels have been wonderful, with hundreds of thousands of Rands worth of goods or vouchers being purchased and handed out. Sadly, in spite of the large amount promised by central government to assist with food aid, it appears that not much has reached us as yet, and the bulk of food aid currently being given is coming from private donors. At the same time, we salute government officials, including the SAPS, who are doing what they can. There are many wonderful caring people around, officials and volunteers, and it is a privilege to work with them and to join hands in this way.

CONCLUSION

Today we return once again to the good shepherd, the Lord who guides us, the Lord who holds us in the palm of his hands, the Lord, our good shepherd, who knows us by name and who will never let us go. He is our resting place; he leads us beside still waters; he restores our souls; he lays a table before us. Our good shepherd. May we go forth, quietly trusting in his care and his provision.

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Dean of Grahamstown
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