

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

Sunday 21 April 2024

Easter 4

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. We are still in Eastertide. Today, we are looking back at what Jesus said about his death and this leads to life for us. And... not just life for us but for our families and friends, and all who touch our lives. Jesus has huge ambitions! His church should be like a sheep pen - full of his sheep!

Enjoy pondering how you share your faith. Who might you invite to come to church? To know Jesus?

God bless,

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As you prepare to meet with our Good Shepherd who laid down his life for us, and all of his sheep, place your trust in him.



Loving Shepherd of thy sheep,
keep thy lamb, in safety keep;
nothing can thy pow'r withstand,
none can pluck me from thy hand.

Jane Elizabeth Leeson (1809-1881)

**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home on Easter 4
Sharing!**

PREPARING OURSELVES

Take a moment to be still in God's presence, and feel his love. You may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love - here, in this room. You may also wish to have a bowl of water ready for the time of letting go. When you are ready, say this opening prayer.

Risen Lord Jesus,
as I prepare to spend this time in worship,
I invite you to come and fill this space,
and my inner stillness,
with your presence.

Amen.

LETTING GO

If you come to this time of prayer and reflection with any regrets, with things that you wish you had not said, done or been, offer them to God in the silence of your heart. And, when you are ready, reflect on these words from this week's hymn.

Loving Shepherd, thou didst give
thine own life that we might live;
and the hands outstretched to bless
bear the cruel nails' impress.

Jane Elizabeth Leeson (1809-1881)

If you wish, dip your finger into a bowl of water and make the sign of the cross on your palm.

Feel the Father's forgiveness.



Our verse acknowledges the sacrifice that Jesus made to save our lives, dying on the cross for us. As Jesus says in John 15, 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.' It is the highest sacrifice that anyone can make. We see this time and time again in the news. It reminds me of the brave Palestinian paramedics who drove out in their ambulance to save a young Gazan girl trapped in a car within range of an Israeli tank. They lost their lives in a bid to save hers. Could you or I have done this?

I don't know is my honest answer as, unlike my dad, I have never been in a war zone and seen what I am capable of doing under fire. But - Jesus did do this for us. It is so moving to picture his pierced hand held out in blessing. To feel him forgiving you and I with love.



Contemplate this as you re-read our verse of forgiveness.

*Loving Shepherd, thou didst give
thine own life that we might live;
and the hands outstretched to bless
bear the cruel nails' impress.*

Jane Elizabeth Leeson (1809-1881)

And then, think about what you would like to say to our Lord in return. What is your response to his self-giving sacrifice? His love? Offer him your love and your praise.



*I would praise thee every day,
gladly all thy will obey,
like thy blessed ones above
happy in thy precious love.*

Jane Elizabeth Leeson (1809-1881)

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER

(The Collect)

Today, this prayer is being said across our villages and the worldwide Church. Add your voice to the earthly cycle of prayer to our risen Lord who always listens to our prayers.

Risen Christ,
faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep:
teach us to hear your voice
and to follow your command,
that all your people may be gathered into one flock,
to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Our prayer reminds us to listen out for the voice of Jesus. Daily, he speaks to each one of us. Sometimes, we recognise him and obey his call on us and on our daily lives. We draw closer to him as do his other sheep. Sometimes, we fail to notice his call or we fail to follow when he calls us. Ponder how Jesus can teach you to hear his voice and to obey him. Prayerfully, ask for his guidance.



Loving Shepherd, ever near,
teach thy lamb thy voice to hear;
suffer not my steps to stray
from the straight and narrow way.

Jane Elizabeth Leeson (1809-1881)

Did you notice that the purpose of the prayer (and Jesus' life) is to bring all of God's people into his one flock - his kingdom - the Church? No one should be outside the circle of his love. The prayer is not just about you and me, and our response to Jesus calling us by name. No. It is also about how we encourage others to hear his voice and obey him.

Who might you invite to church... to one of his gatherings?

LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Sharing!

Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

'I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.'

John 10:11-18

Sharing...

In this passage, I can sense the depth of emotion in Jesus' voice as he tells both his friends and his enemies that he is willing to face danger for them, to lay down his life for them. It is such a moving speech. A speech which reveals that Jesus and his Father are as one on this. His Father loves him for this willingness to lay down his life (and pick it up again) for his sheep - you and me... your family and friends... neighbours and strangers.

Ponder the breadth and depth of Jesus' love. If you were to draw the sides of his sheep pen, where would you place its boundaries?

Who would be inside its protective walls?

Who would be outside?

Anyone?



How did you answer these questions? What does this say to you about the calling of Christ's Church?

For me, it says that we need to listen to the voice of Jesus. To wonder... Who is on his heart at this time? Who is he trying to call into his fold? Our role is to help them hear his voice... to guide them towards him... into his sheep pen... into the circle of his protection. As I picture this, I see both a sheep and a sheep dog.

As one of his more experienced sheep, our calling is to know what to do when he calls and go where he calls us. It is to be his role models who inspire others to follow where we go and do what we do.

As one of his sheep dogs, our calling is to understand his whistles, commands and calls, and to go where he directs us so that we round up his wilful and wayward sheep and guide them into his pen. It could be that we are directed towards one or two of his missing sheep, or sent to gather his sheep in greater numbers.

It speaks to me of an inner desire to bring others to Jesus so that his Spirit can speak to theirs. As Christians, we want others to share in the blessing of knowing God's love made real for us by Jesus. Contemplate this idea, does it speak to your heart? If it does, how is our Lord inviting you to be one of his leading sheep or guiding sheep dogs? Ponder this prayerfully.

What is your desire for those who have yet to hear our Lord's voice, to hear him call their name, and follow him?

What is he saying to you?

Our final verse echoes the closing verses of 1 Corinthians 13. It speaks of the deep and abiding joy of being known by God. It is our life's destination. And, going back to the idea of sharing, not just ours.



Where thou leadest I would go,
walking in thy steps below;
then, before thy Father's throne,
I shall know as I am known.

Jane Elizabeth Leeson

OUR PRAYERS

Here are some Eastertide prayers. Feel free to add your own.

Risen Lord, you know me and you love me,
and you call me by name. I am one of your beloved sheep,
who is sometimes a wayward one. Teach me to obey when you call me.

Risen Lord, hear my prayer.

Risen Lord, you know each person on earth,
you want them to be one of your sheep. You invite them to come,
come and join your kingdom on earth. To be as one. Unite, I pray...

Risen Lord, hear my prayer.

Risen Lord, some of your sheep feel worthless,
unloved. It could be because of the lowliness of their position,
what's happened in their life, or their mental health. Raise up, I pray...

Risen Lord, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and praise.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing prayer of blessing for this week.

Risen Lord, come and meet me where I am,
this Eastertide. Fill me with love and joy and peace,
so that I may offer your hope to others.
Bless me and keep my loved ones safe, I pray. **Amen.**