

# worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2024  
Proper 11 | Ordinary 16  
The Revd Dr Adam Scott

## Call to Worship

Good Shepherd,  
remind us that we are your little flock,  
gathered by your Spirit,  
and tended through your love.  
May we know your presence  
as we worship today. Amen.

## Prayers of Approach

As we approach worship, we are going to prepare ourselves by beginning with a simple meditation on Psalm 23.

In this short time of prayer, I will invite you to settle yourself and to focus on your breath, and then to use your imagination to listen to the psalm being read.

Remember, this is an invitation, so feel free to join in as much or as little as you feel able.

Sit in a posture that communicates an openness to God. You may like to close your eyes, but this is not essential. You may like to place your hands in your lap, palms facing upward, if this feels comfortable for you.

Start by noticing how it feels to sit in your chair, with your feet on the floor

*pause*

Now, draw your attention to your breathing, try not to change it, just be aware of it. The feeling of the breath coming in and out of your body [pause]

Allow yourself to settle into your chair, and if possible, for your body to relax

*pause*

You may like to imagine that as you are breathing in, you are drawing in the love of God, and when breathing out, imagine you are releasing any tension in your body, mind or spirit

*pause*

Breathing in and breathing out

*pause*

Drawing in God's love, and releasing tension

*pause*

Breathing in and breathing out

*pause*

Now listen to the Psalm as it is read slowly (read Psalm)

We pray together

**Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

## **Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness**

We come before God held in the knowledge we are loved,  
and with the assurance that we are transformed through God's love:

Loving shepherd

We come to you to confess that  
there are times when we live like sheep without a shepherd;

times we allow our busyness to drive us from places of rest

*Silence*

times we choose paths of discord rather than lovingkindness

*Silence*

times we embrace despair rather than hope

*Silence*

**Jesus is the Good Shepherd  
who has pity on his flock  
and promises goodness and love will be with us**

Follow your shepherd on the right paths,  
and do so in the knowledge you are loved and forgiven. **Amen.**

## All Age Activity

Break the congregation into groups of three or four people. Give each group a piece of paper and some pens. Ask them to divide the page into four sections, and give them the following headings – heart (emotions/feelings), mind, body and spirit; alternatively, you could ask them to draw a pictures to represent these different aspects.

Explain that the scripture passages we will look at today encourage us to see God as a shepherd who sees our needs and seeks to care for us. Ask each group to write ways we care for our hearts (emotions/feelings), our minds, our bodies and our spirits (dependent on the group they are in), as individuals as well as church communities.

## Reading

*St Mark 6:30-34, 53-56*

## Sermon Notes

*Psalm 23*

A well-known and much-loved psalm that brings comfort to many in their time of need.

1) You could prepare a sermon that is pastoral in nature, and take a traditional approach to the Psalm, focusing on the comfort it offers us in our times of need. The structure of the sermon could follow the structure of the Psalm and move from verse to verse. Be careful not to offer false hope or to discourage those experiencing difficult times, and remember the Psalm never says we will not suffer or that we are failing God if we are struggling. It does say that God is present with us in our times of adversity. Your sermon could also be

missional in nature and offered to those who have no faith to look for God's comfort when they are going through difficulty.

2) You may like to preach a sermon that approaches the psalm with scepticism and asks some difficult questions like:

- What good is the phrase 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want' when I am in pain?
- Am I a 'bad Christian' if I cannot experience God's comfort in my suffering?
- Why does God allow us to suffer in the first place?

This is a more challenging sermon to preach, but it can be helpful to faithfully wrestle with these questions and not to give simple answers. I suggest you use some good commentaries if you approach the psalm in this way. This approach is not for the faint hearted but if handled skilfully could build peoples' faith and hope in God.

3) It is possible to offer an alternative to a traditional sermon and allow the Scripture to speak for itself. To do this you could use the Lectio Divina prayer practice. This involves reading the passage slowly several times and then inviting the congregation to meditate on it, respond to it, and then finally contemplate the passage. You can find guidance on how to do this from [https://www.jesuitinstitute.org/Resources/EmmausResources/Lectio%20Divina%20\(Session%201\).pdf](https://www.jesuitinstitute.org/Resources/EmmausResources/Lectio%20Divina%20(Session%201).pdf)

*St Mark 6:30 – 34, 53 – 56*

The lectionary decides not to include the feeding of the 5,000 this week. Instead, our reading today focuses on Jesus and his disciples needing rest and the healing of the people at Gennesaret.

1) You could preach a pastoral sermon that focuses on Jesus and his disciples need for rest. This enables you to comfort and encourage those in our churches and communities who are feeling tired from caring for others. A word of caution here, it would be possible to use this passage to say that Jesus needed rest and yet he continued to minister, so should we. But I do not believe this is the thrust of the passage, it is telling a story not making a theological proclamation. If anything, the passage taken in the context of all of Jesus' teaching points us towards the healthy practice of Sabbath rest.

2) You could prepare a sermon that focuses on verse 53 – 56 and the very real needs of the people in Gennesaret. It would be possible to see them as a nuisance to Jesus and his disciples. But consider that they did not have

healthcare, material resources, some may not even have social support. These are desperate people in need of help, and it is very easy to overlook people like this. You could encourage the congregation to reflect on who is similar in their community or the global community, and what it feels like when we see their overwhelming need. This could leave us like Jesus and the disciples feeling that we have little to offer them. Please remember that there could be members of your congregation who feel they are like the people of Gennesaret.

3) A creative approach to preaching this passage could be to have people in the congregation to act it out, and then to offer reflections during the drama. The preacher would take the role of narrator here.

When doing this kind of 'preaching', it is advisable to have a good script and for people to have prepared beforehand. I would suggest that characters in the drama could offer some insights into how they are feeling, and then the narrator could offer an epilogue, or better lead the congregation in a discussion on their reflections.

## Prayers of Intercession for the World

God who lovingly shepherds all you have created,  
we bring to you those parts of your flock in need,  
trusting that you will be present in every place of pain and suffering,  
offering opportunities for transformation and wholeness.

We pray for the church universal,  
that for all wearied by the constant demands of our time  
it would be a 'good enough' place of nourishment, sanctuary and rest.  
Let us resist making busyness our badge of honour,  
and advocate the divine mandate of our God who made rest holy.

We pray for the earth,  
confessing the relentless demands we place on its resources.  
May all earth's peoples be urgently gripped –  
by a care and concern for sustainable living,  
that we might heed creation's groans, and let the earth find some rest.

We pray for the UK,  
that in these times of polarisation and deepening division,  
a spirit of unity, tolerance and celebration of difference might prevail.  
Let us never be drawn into the evil of demonising others,  
or the scapegoating of culture wars, but united in love,  
for we are – one and all – the Shepherd's flock.

We pray for ourselves and for those we know who are in need,  
for those who are ill in body, mind or spirit,  
that peace, health and wholeness would be experienced wherever possible.  
In a moment's silence, we bring our concerns to God...

May we join with you in acts of shepherding,  
loving as you love, tending as you tend,  
ready always to expand the boundaries of the fold,  
so that all may find a place in your flock.

in the name of Christ, Amen.

## Offertory Introduction and Prayer

God has gifted us everything needed for every human being on earth  
to have a good and fruitful life. We need only be ready to share what we  
ourselves have been blessed to receive.

Let us pray,

God, in response to your great love and generosity,  
we offer these gifts of money and the gift of our lives,  
use them for good, as we seek to serve you and our fellow humans in love,  
Amen.

## Blessing

May God be with you,  
a bright flame before you,  
a guiding star above you,  
a smooth path beneath you,  
and a kindly shepherd behind you.

May you know the blessing of God,  
Creator, Christ and Comforter.  
Amen.

*[Based on prayer of St. Columba]*

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Jesus' hands were kind hands	197	351		
I cannot tell why he whom angels worship	265		350	266
I heard the voice of Jesus say	349	540	248	275
Father, hear the prayer we offer	495	255	518	132
Give to me Lord a thankful heart	497		520	
The king of love my shepherd is	552	462	479	649
<i>Or</i> The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want	679	14	480	660
<i>Or</i> The Lord's my shepherd (Townend)		17	481	1008
In heavenly love abiding	590	551	736	331
As a fire is meant for burning		252		
Spirit of God unseen as the wind		600	394	

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*