

worship



notes

from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 26th April 2026
The Fourth Sunday of Easter
The Revd
Nicola Furley-Smith

Call to Worship

Come and worship the living God,
whose goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives.
Come and worship the living God who gathers us to his side,
as a shepherd gently gathers in the flock.
In the name of Jesus:
Come and worship, for all are welcome here!

Prayer of Adoration

God, who is like a good shepherd,
we are your people.
You count each one of us as your own.
You call us brothers and sisters of Christ.
You know us by name and by nature.
Shepherding God,
we worship you.

God, who is like a good shepherd,
we are your people.
In Christ you have gone ahead that we might follow.
In Christ you have opened springs of living water that we might be refreshed.
In Christ you have conquered death that we might live without fear.
Shepherding God,
we worship you.

God, who is like a good shepherd,
we are your people.
We know your voice,
the voice that draws us closer, the voice that sends us out,
the voice that injustice cannot silence, the voice that sets the prisoner free.
Shepherding God,
we worship you. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

God, who is like a good shepherd,
we are your people,
and we have wandered far from your presence.
We have turned our ears from your voice and listened to other voices –
the voice of greed, the voice of selfishness,
the voices of arrogance and pride.
You have offered us abundance of life,
but we have settled for so much less.
Forgive us.

(time of quiet reflection leading into...)

Assurance of Pardon

Our God is like a good shepherd,
never giving up on those who are lost,
always ready to welcome the wanderer home.
Hear these words and take them to heart.
For you were going astray like sheep,
but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.
Alleluia! Praise be to the living God! Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

For All The Family

The Missing Ingredient

[prop: a can of diet coke, diet pepsi, and a supermarket own brand. Cover up the labels so as not to show which brand is which. Do a taste test with a participant or two from the congregation].

In 1886, John Pemberton invented a new soft drink... others tried to copy the look, taste and smell... but couldn't come up with the "real thing" There was a secret ingredient - code named 7X - without this special ingredient - it just wasn't Coca-Cola. There is a special ingredient to life - it's not a secret... Jesus said that he came that we might have life in great abundance (Jn 10:10)... without Jesus, our lives are missing the most important ingredient.

Readings

1 Peter 2: 19-25 | St John 10:1-10

Prayer for Illumination

O Lord, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.
Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love,
and strength to follow on the path you set before us;
through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sermon Notes

1. Opening

Shepherd acting as both shelter and protection. Sheep gathered close; one wanders, returns at the shepherd's call. Small, intimate community where sheep know to whom they belong. This is Jesus' world—not metaphorical but practical, relational, necessary.

2. Setting the Context of John 10

Follows John 9—healing of the man born blind. Community in turmoil: Who is Jesus? Can he be trusted? Division, suspicion, uncertainty—familiar to our own world.

3. Jesus' Two Images: Shepherd and Gate

Not two separate metaphors but complementary pictures of his identity and mission. Audience “did not understand”—and often we don’t either.

4. Image 1: Jesus the Shepherd

- The true shepherd enters rightly No climbing over the wall; no deception. Comes openly, honestly. Calls by name; sheep recognise his voice.
- The shepherd goes ahead. Leads rather than pushes; takes the first risk. Never sends sheep out alone. Presence, not pressure.
- The communal nature of sheep. Sheep fare best together. Christian life is communal, not solitary. We learn the Shepherd's voice together, in community.
- Competing voices. Many voices try to manipulate or flatter. Jesus' voice seeks our flourishing, not our exploitation.

5. Image 2: Jesus the Gate

Not in contradiction to shepherd; an amplification. The gate is the safe passage where life is found: Pasture, nourishment, freedom, security, abundance. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Life is entered through Christ—not: striving, self-promotion, proving oneself, climbing walls. Contrast: thieves/bandits diminish; Jesus leads transparently.

6. When We Don't Understand. John tells us they didn't grasp the image. We too often hesitate, wander, confuse voices. Yet Jesus remains: calling, leading, seeking, safeguarding.
7. 1 Peter 2:19–25 – The Shepherd Who Brings Us Home Christ's patient endurance; healing wounds; compassion. "You were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned..." Jesus as Guardian of your soul: not shaming, not scolding, protecting and preserving. He brings us home.
8. Today's Challenge: Voices Claiming Our Name. In a world where algorithms mimic intimacy. Many call us by name to get something from us. Jesus alone calls us for our flourishing.
9. Three Gifts of the Gospel Reading 1. Sheep fare best together, community matters; faith is communal. 2. Promise of abundant pasture. Flourishing life is Christ's purpose for us. 3. Christian living is open and honest. No sneaking or coercion. Christ leads plainly; we follow with trust.
10. Closing. May we listen for the Shepherd's voice. May we trust the One who goes ahead. May we find abundant life—together. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Good Shepherd, your sheep need protection.
So much in the world threatens to harm or destroy them.
They are oppressed, exploited, unjustly treated,
prey to conflict and violence. We pray for . . .
We ask that the world may know life in all its fullness.
In your love and mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Good Shepherd, your sheep need good pasture.
So many in the world do not have enough to eat. -
Their lives are narrowed by need as they struggle to exist.
We pray for . . .

We ask that the needy may know life in all its fullness.
In your love and mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Good Shepherd, your sheep need healing.
So many are sick and in pain.
Incapacitated by illness, sorrow, anxiety,
their journey through life is hard. We pray for . . .

We pray that those in trouble
may know life in all its fullness.
In your love and mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Good Shepherd, your sheep need guidance.
So often they do not know the way they should go
but stumble along blindly, not listening for your voice.
We pray for guidance for the Church . . .

We pray that we may know life in all its fullness.
In your love and mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Good Shepherd, your sheep need saving.
So often they stray from you and get lost,
needing your costly forgiveness,
needing you to risk all to fetch them back.
We pray for ourselves . . . *Silence*

We pray that we may know life in all its fullness.
In your love and mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

In the name of the Good Shepherd who lay down his life for the sheep. **Amen.**

Blessing

Go now in the peace of the Shepherd:
gathered in his love,
guided by his voice,
guarded by his grace.
May Christ, the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls,
lead you into abundant life,
And may the blessing of God Almighty
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be amongst us and remain with us
this day and for evermore. Amen.

A Range of Hymns For Eastertide Can Be found Here

<https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/prayer-and-worship/worship-notes/>

In addition Nicola suggests

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
I lift my eyes to the quiet hills	64	81		281
Brother, sister, let me serve you	474	694	611	
I will sing the wondrous story			323	315

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