

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church Wagga Wagga**

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

**25<sup>th</sup> April, 2021**

**The Triune God meets with us**

Jesus said: I am the good shepherd, Alleluia.

**The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, Alleluia.** (John 10:11 NRSV)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

**We sing the hymn 'Good Christian Men Rejoice And Sing' (LH 105)**

1. **Good Christian men, rejoice and sing!  
Now is the triumph of our King:  
To all the world glad news we bring:  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!**
2. **The Lord of life is risen for aye;  
Bring flowers of song to strew His way:  
Let all mankind rejoice and say  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!**
3. **Praise we in songs of victory  
That love, that life which cannot die,  
And sing with hearts uplifted high  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!**
4. **Thy name we bless, O risen Lord,  
And sing today with one accord  
The life laid down, the life restored:  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!**

*Cyril Argentine Alington (1872-1955)  
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**We confess our sins to God the Father...**

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and of each other.

**We confess to you, almighty God, before the whole company of heaven,  
and to each other, that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, by our**

**own fault. Have mercy on us, for Jesus' sake, forgive us all our sins, and bring us to eternal life. Amen.**

*-Silent confession-*

**...and God forgives us**

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon and forgiveness of all our sins.

**Amen.**

Restore us again, O God our Saviour.

**Do not be angry with us any longer.**

**Jesus leads us as we pray**

The Lord be with you

**And also with you.**

Let us pray that we follow our good shepherd. [silence]

Loving God, we thank you that your Son Jesus is the good shepherd who cares for your people.

**Open our hearts to hear his voice, to know him as he calls us by name, and to follow wherever he leads. For he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.**

**Amen.**

**1st Reading – God speaks**

**Acts 4:5-12** *Peter and John before the council*

<sup>5</sup> The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup> Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. <sup>7</sup> They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup> If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, <sup>10</sup> then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. <sup>11</sup> Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,  
which has become the cornerstone.”

<sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

This is the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

### **We respond with Psalm 23**

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,

<sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.

**The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.**

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

**The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.**

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.

**The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.**

### **2nd Reading – God speaks through his apostles**

**1 John 3:16-24** *The Christian's assurance*

<sup>16</sup> This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? <sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words

or speech but with actions and in truth.

<sup>19</sup> This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: <sup>20</sup> If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup> Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God <sup>22</sup> and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup> And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. <sup>24</sup> The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

This is the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

### **Gospel reading – God speaks through Jesus**

**John 10:11-18** *The good shepherd dies for the sheep*

<sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> 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."

This is the gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ, raised to live forever.**

Thank you, Lord Jesus, our good shepherd, for being willing to die for your sheep.

**Lead us to know you and to follow you.**

**Amen.**

**God speaks to His children**

**We sing the song 'Christ Be Our Light' (ATOK 313)**

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.  
Longing for truth, we turn to you.  
Make us your own, your holy people,  
light for the world to see.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your church gathered today*

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has power to save us.  
Make us your living voice.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your church gathered today*

3. Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your church gathered today*

4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others  
walls made of living stone.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.*

***Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your church gathered today***

5. **Many the gifts, many the people,  
many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
making your kingdom come.**

***Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your church gathered today***

*Words and music: Bernadette Farrell  
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### **God speaks to us**

*The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

The Text: John 10:11-18

One of our most significant days on our calendar is Anzac Day. An enduring image of Anzac Day is Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick's famous work as a stretcher-bearer at Gallipoli in 1914. Using one of the donkeys brought in for carrying water, Private Kirkpatrick transported seriously wounded soldiers day and night through enemy fire and exploding shrapnel on the back of his donkey, so that they could get the medical attention they desperately needed. Day after day he risked his life to save the lives of others.

On the 19th of May 1915, Private Kirkpatrick would risk his life for the last time, killed by machine-gun fire while carrying two wounded men on the back of his donkey. The heroic feats of 'Simpson and his donkey' which have such a prominent place in ANZAC history is perhaps one of the clearest analogies from human experience to illustrate what God is like. Simpson ferrying the wounded and dying to safety on the back of his donkey is like the picture of God that the Psalmist paints for us in today's Psalm, Psalm 23—the Lord is our shepherd who travels with us even through the very valley of the shadow of death.

In today's Gospel Reading, Jesus proclaims himself to be the Shepherd that Psalm 23 speaks of. He says: "I am the good shepherd."

He is not like a hired worker whose only interest is in his wages because the sheep do not belong to him and he is therefore not really invested in the care of the sheep. This is ultimately seen when a wolf comes to attack the flock. In the face of such danger, the hired hand abandons the sheep to preserve his own life, leaving the sheep at the peril of the wolf.

But a shepherd has a responsibility to protect his sheep. To the Jewish audience Jesus was originally speaking, the image of a shepherd protecting his flock in the face of a ferocious wolf would be a familiar one. The Mishnah (an authoritative interpretation of Jewish law by the Rabbis) state that it was the legal responsibility of the shepherd to defend the sheep if a wolf attacked the flock. So if a wolf came the shepherd would stand between the wolf and his sheep because they are his sheep, and he defends them. And so the Psalmist says: "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me".

When Jesus says that he is the Good Shepherd, he is saying that he is a shepherd like no other. He is the shepherd, with a unique excellence, because he is the shepherd who lays down his life to protect his sheep. If the wolf wants to get his sheep it will have to be over his dead body.

What's all this talk of shepherds and wolves about?! When he speaks of the wolf, I think Jesus is referring to the devil, who comes to kill, steal and destroy. Since the very beginning the devil has been like a wolf, trying to plunder God's flock and steal God's people away.

But God's intention has always been for all people to be in relationship with him and share in his fullness of life. He created humankind in his own image, to know him and be his representatives on earth. After God had made everything else he created Adam and Eve as the pinnacle of his creation, and we hear in Genesis that God declared his creation "was very good". It was very good because it was just as God had intended. Whatever God commanded came into existence. His words brought it about. All through Genesis we hear the words: "God said...let there be...and it was so"

Then the devil came...not with a ferocious attack but subtle deception, planning to put a chasm between the human race and God. He said to the woman:

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

"You will not certainly die," the devil said. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:1b-5).

Where animals and even inanimate objects obeyed the voice of God, Eve and Adam, with free will didn't. "Did God really say?" It wasn't so much a temptation to take a bite from an apple but to be their own authority and determine good and evil. They fell to the Devil's trick to think they knew better than God himself. They only thought of themselves, without stopping to think of how their abuse of freedom would have consequences for others. And it has the worst of consequences for others—their putting God aside meant that all humanity has inherited this condition as part of our nature, so that in humanity's natural state, the self is the focal point of everything.

Because of the sinful nature, human beings naturally evaluate everything through the same lens Adam and Eve did—the self. We decide what truth is and no one else should dare tell us otherwise. Genesis is written off as foolishness and people put their faith in the Big Bang and evolution instead, which give no hope of a Creator and Redeemer. Society sees boredom as the great devil and does whatever it can in the name of entertainment to banish that devil away, attempting to sooth fear and anxiety, or search for meaning and identity, or meet unmet needs in whatever way we can. Like sheep we follow our consumerist Western culture that says we are only significant and worthwhile; we only have value, dignity and purpose if we buy the latest stuff or measure up to the latest fashions, and so we live our whole life to gain the approval of others.

The Ten Commandments are dismissed, because morality is what we decide it should be, differing from one person to the next. The self says that we have a right to whatever we decide to have...even if that means hurting and exploiting others, and even if it means causing a world war. We evaluate relationships through this same lens—we cut those off who don't measure up to our expectations, and we keep searching until we find people who do. We decide who is worthy of our attention and favour, and who is not.

We share in the consequences of this autonomy too. Just as Adam and Eve hid from God and blamed each other and even him, from the moment of our



conception there is separation between us and God too. We can't know God by our own reason or come to him. This separation is an eternal one as the wages of sin—death—has come to the human race. This isn't God's problem, it's ours. But God took the initiative to rectify it and redeem us. God didn't decide who he should forgive and under what conditions. He sent Jesus into our world to be our Good Shepherd, and lay down his life on the Cross, even for those who would reject him. Jesus says that his Father commanded him to do this. There, on the Cross, Jesus took our place and laid down his life. That was the price God paid, the sacrifice he made, to redeem the world by his Son's holy and precious blood, the perfect sacrifice for our sins. There on the Cross, Jesus stood between the wolf, the devil, and broke the power of the kingdom of darkness for us.

That seems to present a problem though, doesn't it? If a shepherd gives his life in the attempt to protect the flock, he actually can't ensure the safety of the sheep. Once the shepherd is dead, his sheep are then easy prey. But Jesus, the incomparably good shepherd, laid down his life with the purpose of taking it up again. Jesus has not fled from the powers of evil and death but confronted them head on. He has shepherded us through the valley of the shadow of death and by rising from death itself is ever present with his saving help.

With all the talk of sheep and shepherds and wolves it's not surprising that this fourth Sunday of the Easter season be known as "Good Shepherd Sunday."

Historically today was called by the Latin name *Misericordias Domini* *[note to reader: pronounced: misery-cord-ee-as dom-i-knee]* "The Merciful heart of the Lord". For it is there on the Cross we see the merciful heart of God, laying down his own life in Christ for all people, even though we don't deserve it.

God delivers his mercy, love and grace and everything that his redemption of us means personally in baptism. He has given us all the saving benefits of his death and resurrection at the font. It was in the waters of baptism that our old nature died with Christ, and he made us a new creation, that we might live in the new life he won for the world. By our strength that's impossible to do, so in baptism God united us with Jesus to share in his own death and resurrection, buried with him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life—sharing in God's own life, forever.

God has washed our sins away and has given to us his own purity and righteousness, so that not even death can separate us from our Good Shepherd. We were among those whom Jesus was speaking of to his original audience two

thousand years ago: "I have other sheep that are not of these sheepfold and I must lead these to myself also." He says about us: "I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep and they know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father". For us to know Jesus and him to know us is to go far beyond intellectual knowledge. It is a deep personal relational knowing. It is to say in faith: Jesus lived his sinless life and died his innocent death for me. He is my Saviour. I belong to him each day and forever.

We may not know all that God is doing in your life. But Jesus is our Good Shepherd knows each one of us, more closely than anyone else. He knows all our fears, he knows what we need in our daily lives and the pressures we face: struggles with health, financial pressures, a failed business, bullying at school, academic difficulties, relationship breakdown, or our feelings of being unimportant and unloved. Jesus knows our frailty, our fears, our sin. He loves us because he laid down his life for us and took it up again to prove it. Listen to our Good Shepherd as he speaks through the Scriptures, his words of life. Through them, he will lead us closer to him that we may share in the same faith as the Psalmist and dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

### **We confess our faith in the Triune God**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried.  
He descended into hell.**

**The third day he rose again from the dead.**

**He ascended into heaven,  
and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,  
from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.**

**Amen.**

*\* 'catholic' here meaning 'universal'*

**We sing the hymn 'Saviour, like a shepherd lead us' (LHS 604)**

1. Saviour, like a shepherd lead us,  
much we need your tender care;  
in your pleasant pastures feed us,  
keep us safely with you there.  
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus!  
You have bought us, yours we are.
2. We are yours; O Lord, befriend us.  
be the guardian of our way;  
keep your flock; from sin defend us;  
seek us when we go astray.  
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus!  
Hear, O hear us when we pray.
3. You have promised to receive us,  
poor and sinful though we be;  
you have mercy to relieve us,  
grace to cleanse, and power to free.  
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus!  
Look upon us favourably.
4. Early let us seek your favour,  
early let us do your will;  
blessèd Lord and only Saviour,  
come with love our hearts to fill.  
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus!  
You have loved us, love us still.

*'Hymns for the Young' (1836), alt.  
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**We give of ourselves**

Eternal loving Shepherd, your Son laid down his life for us, his sheep.

**Help us to follow him by loving and serving the people around us.**

**Amen.**

## **We pray for others**

*As sheep trust their shepherd for guidance and protection, let us turn to our God in prayer, certain that he hears our voice for the sake of Jesus Christ his Son.*

Heavenly Father, we pray for all pastors, as they shepherd the flock of Christ, especially we pray for our bishop John Henderson and our district bishop Robert Bartholomaeus. In all their difficult tasks we pray that you will give them strength, wisdom and guidance.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Care for all who are called to lay down their lives and are suffering for their faith. Give them the strength and the faith to endure their hardships, and bring people to faith through their witness. Give to us the faith to stand firm against oppression and persecution and help us to give a strong testimony of our faith at all times.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all rulers and governments around the world. Help them to be faithful shepherds to their people. Make them favourable to your word so that people everywhere may be able to worship you freely.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who have become lost on the path of life. Bring them back to your fold. Help us all to care for our lost brothers and sisters and to help where we can to remind them of your constant goodness and kindness. We pray for your protection over the families of our congregation and for all young people undergoing confirmation instruction. Open their hearts and their minds to hear your voice and to follow you on the right paths.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Watch over the dying and those who mourn. Walk with them through the valley of the shadow of death and bring them safely to your pasture. Comfort those who mourn with the hope that we have in you, that we will all be raised again in the final resurrection from the dead and that with you we may feast in your house forever.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for all who serve and have served in our armed forces. This ANZAC Day, we pray for those suffering from the effects of war, mental and

physical. We pray for those with friends and relatives in current theatres of war, for those mourning people who died in war, and for the carers of returned servicemen and women. Guide those in authority, so that they may engage in war only for the sake of peace. Lord God, we pray that we may love our enemies, just as you love the world.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Shepherd God, you gather your sheep from all corners of the world, and do not allow even one of your flock to be lost. May we and all people hear your voice, and be gathered into the one flock of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **We pray the prayer of Jesus**

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.** *Matt 6:9-13*

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.**

**Amen.**

### **The Triune God sends us out with blessing**

May the God of peace, who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus, provide you with every good thing you need in order to do his will;

Go in peace, and follow the good shepherd.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **We sing the song 'His Name Is Wonderful' (ATN 55)**

- 1. His name is wonderful,  
His name is wonderful,  
His name is wonderful,  
Jesus my Lord!**

2. **He is the mighty King,  
Master of everything!  
His name is Wonderful,  
Jesus my Lord!**

*He's the great shepherd,  
The rock of all ages,  
Almighty God is he!*

3. **Bow down before him,  
Love and adore him;  
His name is Wonderful,  
Jesus my Lord!**

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## **Announcements**