



The Good Shepherd 3rd Century Fresco, artist unknown

From the Catacombs of Priscilla, Rome. Downloaded from <https://scotland.op.org/>

The Lord Will Be Israel's Shepherd

34 The word of the Lord came to me: ²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

⁷“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ⁸As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, ⁹therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ¹⁰This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.

¹¹“For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹²As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. ¹⁶I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Ezekiel 34:1-16 (vs 1-11 are a lectionary reading for today)

Silence, Prayer, And Communion Ending 9.30 a.m.

Silence

A time for thought...reflection...prayer

Praise

O Lord, open our lips

and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

A prayer of thanksgiving

Blessed are you, creator of all,

to you be praise and glory for ever.

As your dawn renews the face of the earth

bringing light and life to all creation,

may we rejoice in this day you have made;

as we wake refreshed from the depths of sleep,

open our eyes to behold your presence

and strengthen our hands to do your will,

that the world may rejoice and give you praise.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God for ever.

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;

let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,

so may the light of your presence, O God,

set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Psalm for today (Psalm 23)

1 The Lord is my shepherd; ♦

therefore can I lack nothing.

2 **He makes me lie down in green pastures ♦**

and leads me beside still waters.

3 He shall refresh my soul ♦

and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 **Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,**

I will fear no evil; ♦

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You spread a table before me

in the presence of those who trouble me; ♦

you have anointed my head with oil

and my cup shall be full.

**6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, ♦
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.**

**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

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want

Heavenly Father we thank you for the bounteous provision of nature that we see around us, even during this time of drought. Help us not take this for granted as we enjoy the beauty and plenty of the Kent countryside in summer. In our thankfulness help us to remember and to provide practical and prayerful help to those who have not enjoyed the gentle climate that we take for granted. We pray for those affected by the drought in and wildfires in various parts of Europe. Above all we pray for those in the semi-arid regions of the Sahel and other countries where the effects of drought have been exacerbated by conflict and political instability.

Lord God we ask that with your help the day may come when they too will be able to say: "I shall not want".

Loving lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

He leadeth me by still waters, he restores my soul

Heavenly Father we pray for those who are troubled - through financial insecurity; worries about their job; family troubles; worries about children; concerns about health; or suffering from stress or depression; and those who have been bereaved.

In a moment of quiet let us bring before God someone we know who is troubled now.....

Lord God reach out to those in trouble that they too sense Your presence and through it feel their souls restored.

Loving lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil.

Heavenly Father right now there are many who must feel they are walking through the valley of the shadow of death as they come against evil around them. People in the Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Palestine, Iran and the Gulf states, people living in fear of crime or terrorism and those who feel so alienated from the society they live in that they can contemplate terrorist acts. We bring before you those who carry

the burden of spiritual or political leadership who have to make decisions in the struggle between right and wrong, good and evil.

Lord we pray that all may sense your presence, that leaders may act with wisdom and justice and that ordinary people show mutual respect and reconciliation to former enemies, so that a time will come when they too can say: "I fear no evil".

Loving lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever

Finally Lord, in humility and with an overwhelming sense of your grace and goodness to us, we pray that, like David, we too may look forward to the day when we shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Loving lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

The Collect for last Sunday (11th after Trinity) said together:

God of glory,

the end of our searching,

help us to lay aside all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom,

and to give all that we have to gain the pearl beyond all price,

through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God,

we thank you that you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day.

Keep us from falling into sin or running into danger,

order us in all our doings and guide us to do always

what is righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

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.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever. Amen.

Ending

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God

The next SPACE will be on Wednesday 19th August

Good shepherds and bad shepherds

Beneath the streets of Rome lies a complex of tunnels containing the tombs of thousands of Christians buried during the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries. Frescoes decorating the walls and ceilings of these tunnels are some of the earliest surviving works of Christian art. The fresco of the Good Shepherd is a good example and was an obvious choice for this location as this image has long been associated with the afterlife – something which we still see today in the frequent use of Psalm 23 in funeral services.

The fresco is rich biblical allusion. At first glance we see a young man with an animal draped across his shoulders and think of Jesus' declaration that he is the good shepherd (John 10:14). Then, because the shepherd is pointing to a sheep on his right and a goat on his left, we recall words from Matthew 25 when Jesus speaks of a time of final judgement:

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (Matthew 25:32-33)

But look again at the animal the man carries. It is a **goat**, not a sheep. The artist is reminding us of yet another biblical reference; this time to Luke 15 and the parable of the lost sheep, which ends in v 7 with these words:

In the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. (

The unknown fresco artist has combined these passages to present the viewer with a rounded picture of Jesus' role and a message of profound hope. Jesus the caring shepherd, fully aware that we, his flock, are under God's judgement, goes to great lengths to bring back the errant sinner who repents.

But what of the shepherds whom the prophet Ezekiel berates in today's bible passage? They were the harsh and uncaring leaders of ancient Israel who put self-interest before service to their people; shepherds who neglected their flock, allowing them to stray and scatter and made no effort to bring them back, leaving the people like sheep without a shepherd.

Ezekiel tempers present criticism with a promise of future hope. God himself will look after his people, just as a shepherd looks after his flock. He will bring back the lost, bind the injured, and take them all to good pastures. When in John 10:11 Jesus announces that he is the Good Shepherd his Jewish audience would recall that passage from Ezekiel. For the neglectful shepherds, the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time, it was a biting reprimand but to those in the crowds who identified with the sheep it was a message of hope. Thank God.