



Statue of Jesus as the Good Shepherd

Photo taken by Archbishop Anne at the Callisto Catacombs in Rome 2015

The Divine Shepherd

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;^[a]

³ he restores my soul.^[b]
He leads me in right paths^[c]
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.^[g]

“In a mere 57 words of Hebrew, the author of the 23rd Psalm gives us an entire theology.

He teaches us to look at the world and see it as God would have us see it.

If we are anxious, the psalm gives us courage to overcome our fears.

If we are grieving, it offers comfort, and we find our way through the valley of the shadow.

If our lives are embittered with unpleasant people, it teaches us how to deal with them.

If the world threatens to wear us down, the psalm teaches us to replenish our souls.

If we are obsessed with what we lack, the psalm teaches us gratitude for what we have.

And if we are alone and adrift in a friendless world, it offers us the priceless reassurance that,

“Thou art with me’.”

(Rabbi Harold Kushner The Lord is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom of the Twenty Third Psalm)

Dear People of the Good Shepherd,

When the Risen Christ stood among his fearful disciples, hidden away in a locked room, he stretched out his wounded hands and said to them, "Peace be with you."

The sight of Jesus gladdened the disciples' hearts and filled them with boldness and fresh hope.

I greet you with the words of the One who promises always to be with us as we make our way through Eastertide.

Peace be with you.

Peace be with you.

Peace be with you.

We are now entering the third week of the latest 'Stay at Home' order in the Province of Ontario as variants of concern appear to be overtaking the ability to vaccinate the population. The rise in the number of patients in Intensive Care Units and on respirators is so alarming that it threatens to overwhelm our health care system. Doctors may be asked to make difficult decisions about who to offer life saving treatments. And hundreds of thousands of surgeries have been further delayed, affecting other patients' lives.

This week there have been more cases of Covid-19 in Ontario than at any other time in the pandemic, with younger people being infected very severely. Our dedicated healthcare workers are exhausted from overwork, and frustrated that there continue to be individuals who are ignoring the directives and are putting their lives and the lives of others at risk.

At the start of the pandemic the phrase '*we are all in this together*' was widely used to describe how the Covid-19 coronavirus affected every country and person on planet earth.

The lived reality and experience of millions of people around the world is something quite different. The pandemic has revealed massive injustices and inequalities especially for those living in poverty, multi-generational dwellings, or racialized communities. In addition, there has also been an epidemic of loneliness and an increase in mental health issues due to isolation, anxiety, and stress.

There is also the justice issue of vaccine equity which will ensure that every person on earth has equal access to receiving a vaccination.

On the surface it seems that there is little we can do to change such a bleak picture. This is simply not true!

Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, *“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”* The individual choices and the many sacrifices being made are making a substantial difference.

Thank you for ‘Loving Your Neighbour’ and following the directives and guidelines set out by the local, provincial, and ecclesial authorities over the entire course of the pandemic. And thank you for every prayer offered for those who are sick with covid, for those who have died, and for those who are bereaved. They are also making a difference.

God’s mission will not be stopped and carries on unabated. Over the last year we have shown that we can adapt and change as we are continually learning new ways of being the church in these challenging times.

Creative online services of worship on a number of platforms continue, as do Bible studies and meetings, and the work of committees at the parish and diocesan level.

The hungry homeless are being fed and clothed through important outreach programs and exciting new ministries are beginning.

Pastoral care teams, and ministries of prayer, support, and encouragement are keeping us connected and growing in our faith.

Important too are the regular financial offerings given to sustain important ministries. While we are thankful for the assistance of the Wage Subsidy program to assist with the stipends of clergy and lay on our payroll, we know this will eventually come to an end. The church continues to rely on our generosity and you can be certain that in times like these every cent counts.

Thank you for your commitment and faithfulness in giving generously of your time, talent, and treasure to support the work of the church.

This coming Sunday (25th April) is Good Shepherd Sunday. The good shepherd, we are reminded through the Scriptures and in the beautiful hymns appointed for the day, is the One who saves, addresses, calls, protects, feeds, and leads the sheep back home.

The sheep in turn hear, follow, recognise, and benefit from the shepherd’s voice, since the shepherd leads them to green pastures and still waters.

The good shepherd is the One who is so committed to the sheep that he is willing to lay down his life for them. This is good news for us today.

Jesus, says John in this week’s gospel, is the good shepherd who wants to be known and to know the sheep of his flock. This describes the beautiful mutuality in the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, similar to the loving relationship between Jesus and the Father. It also describes the committed and loving relationship we are called to have with Jesus and with one another in our local and global communities.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu once coined the word 'ubuntu' meaning *a person is a person through other persons* to describe this sense of interconnectedness and belonging. He claims, very simply, that we need each other and that being open, available, and affirming of others is the very essence of being human.

We are an Easter people who believe that the One who is risen is the good shepherd who knows us in the same way that he knows God, and who loves us with such fierce love that he is willing to give up his life for us. Let us rest in that knowledge and love those the good shepherd loves with that same fierce love.

"I am the Good Shepherd," says Jesus. And what he says to us, he says to all.

A few weeks ago I heard this prayer (attributed to Augustine of Hippo) for the first time as Canon John Gibaut prayed it at the Thorneloe Board of Governors meeting. It has been one of my daily prayers since then, and a source of great encouragement for me. May it be the same for you.

*God of life,
there are days when the burdens we carry
are heavy on our shoulders and weigh us down,
when the road seems dreary and endless,
the skies grey and threatening,
when our lives have no music in them,
and our hearts are lonely,
and our souls have lost their courage.
Flood the path with light,
turn our eyes to where the skies are full of promise;
tune our hearts to brave music;
give us a sense of comradeship
with heroes and saints of every age;
and so quicken our spirits
that we may be able to encourage
the souls of all who journey with us on the road of life,
to your honour and glory. **Amen***

In the love and hope of our risen Lord,

+ *Anne*