

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
20th April 2021**

READINGS

I have always enjoyed watching sheep. I know from farmers that sheep are not all what they appear and can be unruly creatures. Yet I have always found peaceful the pastoral scene of sheep up on the hills hanging out together. This spring we have enjoyed showing Lydia the new wee lambs that have been born on a nearby hill in our town. We can hear their bleating if we listen closely. We have enjoyed seeing them cosying up to their mums and frolicking with one another in the fields. When snow fell just two weeks ago, I learned about what's called the lambing snow. The farmers are well acquainted with it and are prepared to help their sheep through any difficulties that arise. I am reminded that our God knows just what we need as well and is not surprised by any of the situations that crop up for us in our lives. The image of God our shepherd who cares for us (even when snow unexpectedly falls) is a picture that we see often in Scripture:

*¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
²He makes me lie down in green pastures;
 he leads me beside still waters
 ³he restores my soul.
 He leads me in right paths
 for his name's sake.*

(Psalm 23:1-3, NRSV)

¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

(John 10:11-15, NRSV)

God is also pictured as one who covers us with his wings. Or as a hen who cares for her chicks. God shows us his love and mercy for us in both masculine and feminine images:

*¹You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
 who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
²will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;
 my God, in whom I trust."
³For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
 and from the deadly pestilence;
⁴he will cover you with his pinions,
 and under his wings you will find refuge;
 his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
⁵You will not fear the terror of the night,
 or the arrow that flies by day,
⁶or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.*

(Psalm 91:1-6, NRSV)

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!
How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood
under her wings, and you were not willing!*

(Luke 13:34, NRSV)

Our God is one that comforts and leads us as a wise shepherd. We can hear his voice as he tends to our wounds. God lays down his life for us and offers us life to the full. He covers us with his wings and shelters us in the storm. The Lord gathers us as a mother hen brings together and provides for her chicks. We are loved without reservation.

REFLECTION

We are facing a very uncertain time just now. We are moving out of lockdown and are starting to resume some of our “normal” routines again. We are traveling about again and meeting up with friends and family. We are looking to the future but are still uncertain about what lies ahead. We are receiving our jags, wearing our face masks, keeping two meters apart and are washing our hands continually. Yet we still cannot predict those lambing snows. There will always be something that catches us by surprise. We can be certain however, that nothing is unexpected to our God. As the good shepherd prepares for every situation, God is well aware of what is up ahead. He has the love and nurture we need to make it through this challenging time.

For many of us, life has been on hold, and we have not been able to grieve the losses we have sustained through the impact of COVID 19: people in our lives who have passed into eternity, lost opportunities, and fears and challenges that have piled up. As we come out of this time of lockdown, we might find ourselves surprisingly struggling with grief. It is okay if we are not chipper or feeling light-hearted. It is to be expected if we are hurting and grieving. Our God comforts us and cries with us in our sorrow.

Snuggle in God's arms. When you are hurting, when you feel lonely, left out. Let Him cradle you, comfort you, reassure you of His all-sufficient power and love.

~Kay Arthur

You don't have to be alone in your hurt! Comfort is yours. Joy is an option. And it's all been made possible by your Saviour. He went without comfort so you might have it. He postponed joy so you might share in it. He willingly chose isolation so you might never be alone in your hurt and sorrow.

~Joni Eareckson Tada

As we all need God to direct our steps, just as a shepherd would his sheep, or a hen her chicks, we are also given resources for managing these tough times. I am once again reminded of the sheep on the hill near my house. The sheep are scattered throughout the hillside, but they are a communal group. I know they need guidance to stay together, but so do humans! Friends, we need one another and God to make it through the lambing snows and the dips and valleys before us.

Being together is a gift and one that we have been physically deprived of over the last year. I for one am looking forward to gathering for worship in person (even with masks and social distancing), for someday soon sharing a cuppa together and to making in-person pastoral visits. I hope you too are looking at the future with hope and not allowing

fears to overcome you. I am praying we can all face the joys of this new season with the assurance that we are not alone, we have one another and our God who will never leave us or forsake us.

PRAYER

Loving God,
Shepherd of our souls,
The one who gathers us in as your chicks,
Who cares for us in our grief and sorrow.
You set our feet on firm places and give us hope for tomorrow.
Thank you for providing us with community that surrounds us like your loving arms.
Thank you for the intelligence and creativity you have given to the scientists throughout the world as they have developed vaccines and treatments for COVID 19 in this last year.
Thank you for giving us new beginnings.

In Jesus name we pray,
Amen.

