

you have given us hope;
guard us by your love
and, in your wisdom,
keep us in eternal life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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.

Young People's address

I don't know what your household is like when it comes to watching television, but in our house, if there is a documentary that involves vets or farms it's likely to be on. I guess it all started with "Vets in Practice" a number of years ago (which the older among us may remember) but now we have such programmes as "Highland Vets", "The Yorkshire Vet", "This Week on the Farm", "Springtime on the Farm", "Our Yorkshire Farm", "Escape to the Farm" and "Our Farm in the Dales" to name all the ones I can remember at the moment and that have been on television this year.

We don't see it much on the really large farms, but on the smaller ones we often find that the farmers or their families have named the individual animals. Now, not being a farmer myself, I have a real difficulty in identifying individual animals; I may be able to distinguish between some of the breeds though – take sheep for example; I know there are breeds called "Swaledale", "Cotswold", "Hebridean", "Shetland", "Hampshire", and "Black Welsh Mountain" to name a few, and I might even be able to guess which sheep are which breed in a crowd of them, but to tell the difference between each individual sheep, well, that's something else!

The thing is, that human's relationship with sheep is not new – it goes back many centuries, even King David from the Old Testament knew about sheep! Jesus was also familiar with the way the people of His time interacted with sheep and on a number of occasions he used that relationship as an example to illustrate His message.

He talked about how the people who were employed to look after the sheep had no respect for them, didn't really care for them and would run away if any danger came, whereas the shepherd really cared for his sheep and would protect them from danger, even risking his own life to protect them. This, the people of His time could really understand.

But He also equated us to the sheep and himself to the shepherd. He said that, just as the shepherd really cared for his sheep, knew all of them by name and would protect them from all dangers, so too He cares for all of us, knows each one of us by name and would protect us all the time.

So, as you go about your daily life, remember that Jesus, our good shepherd is always looking after us.

Young People's Hymn – Parts of the Body

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaB-WkaOHDY>

*We are the parts of the body,
Every person belonging,
All of us just as important as the other one.*

How can the eye say to the hand,
"You're not needed! You're not needed!"?
How can the head say to the feet,
"You're not needed! You're not needed!"?
I need you, you need me,
Let's be who we're made to be,
Everybody different with a special part to play.

How would we look if we were all a foot?
Just imagine, just imagine!
Where would we be if we all were a knee?
Just imagine, just imagine!
I need you, you need me,
Let's be who we're made to be,
Everybody different with a special part to play.

Why should the ear say to the mouth,
"I'm not worthy! I'm not worthy!"
Why should the nose say to the lips,
"I'm not worthy! I'm not worthy!"
I need you, you need me,
Let's be who we're made to be,
Everybody different with a special part to play.

Children go to Sunday School Zoom

1 John 3:16-24 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

¹⁶This 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. ¹⁷If 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? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

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

John 10:11-18 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

¹¹ 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² 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. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

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

Hymn StF 481 The Lord's my shepherd <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYJC8ALPRhQ>

1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want ;
he makes me lie in pastures green,
he leads me by the still, still waters,
his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

2 He guides my ways in righteousness,
and he anoints my head with oil ;
and my cup — it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.

3 And though I walk the darkest path —
I will not fear the evil one,
for you are with me, and your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know.

Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Sermon

I used to be angry at Pilate – he was so weak that he could not make a decision and just let the Pharisees and crowd push him around and get their own way. In washing his hands he indicated that he was not willing to make a judgement either way on Jesus.

Now I feel sorry for him – he has been blamed for letting Jesus, an innocent man, die a cruel and humiliating traitor's death.

But, it was all part of God's plan, and Jesus knew it! Yet again, as happened on a number of occasions in the Old Testament, God used a non-Jew to fulfil His eternal plan.

If Pilate had been the strong leader that we think he should have been – Jesus would not have been crucified, and there would have been no resurrection and God's whole plan would have gone down the drain!

BUT, Jesus knew what was going to happen and he willingly went forth and did what he had to do.

In John 10, we see Him telling his disciples that he would lay down His life, of His own free will, because He knew this was what had to be done. He also knew he had authority from God, His Father, to do so, but he also knew that, by that same authority, he would be raised again.

In a very marked contrast to Jesus' thoughts; don't we live in a very self centred society? – It's all about ME! MY life, MY family, MY job, MY home, MY hobbies, MY Church. Everything we do is wrapped around the way WE want to do things.

And, if things start to change in a way we do not like, we move on, we get a divorce, we change our job, we buy a new house, we find different hobbies, we move to a different church (or even a different religion) all because it doesn't suit US any more. And, ultimately, some people say "It's MY life and I can end it if I want"

Alternatively, we try to make sure that NOTHING changes. We hold onto the past with all of our strength and woe betides anyone who tries to change things.

The trouble is; things ARE changing – all the time, and the mere fact of us trying to keep things the same, will mean that it will eventually change, because it cannot be sustained the way it is. New inventions, new laws, and new ways of doing things will all force us to change or just become irrelevant.

Again, in John 10, and at other times, Jesus talks about laying down his life and suggesting that others should follow His pattern. But, what does that actually mean? We normally assume it means dying for them, but does it? Could it not equally mean the laying down of one's old life (the dreams, aspirations and way of life one had before) and taking up a new one? That is, changing your life around and going in a completely different direction, not because you wanted to, but because the new direction would be better for someone else, and not just Jesus/God. We may sometimes see something like this in a marriage; one person changing completely to please or suit the needs of their partner, but this has a beneficial result for the person who changes as well. They would do anything to please/stay with their chosen partner, because the need to stay with them outweighs their need to retain their old ways.

But how about changing for someone else even though you are completely happy with the way things are at the moment? Or, even worse for you, knowing that the new direction will lead you to places and problems that you would much rather stay away from. Now, that's quite a different matter!

In the first letter of John, he tells his readers that they are not to love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. But aren't we very good, in our self-centred society, of saying that we love other people, and care about what happens to them and then just leaving it up to God to do something without us lifting a finger ourselves. How many times do we hear, even in our churches "somebody really ought to do something about that", often aimed at our government, both local and national, but usually aimed at the anonymous "SOMEBODY"?

Well, unless I am mistaken, you are not me, therefore you must be somebody else. So you are a somebody to me and I am a somebody to you. Therefore, we are all "SOMEBODY".

What is that old saying? – "Actions speak louder than words". Again in a marriage, telling your partner you love them is a good thing to do; showing them that you love them by doing something special for them is better; but giving up something you wanted to do so that you can do something special for your partner is really special.

Well, John's letter is telling his readers that "Actions are better than words". So how about we go and do some actions! Rather than just talk about God's love, why don't we SHOW God's love to those around us, even if we are not too comfortable with it?

We often think that we are doing something to help because we put money into collecting boxes. Well, that's a good thing to do, BUT it doesn't go anywhere near far enough. When we look at the few coppers we put in and compare it to what we have left – it's pitiful. And it's just pushing the responsibility onto some else and expecting them to do it on our behalf. Now, OK, I guess that sometimes that is good, as these collections can go to bigger agencies with the expertise and muscle to act.

But what about local things? When was the last time you went out of your way to perform an ARK (Act of Random Kindness)? You know the sort of things:

- Visiting a neighbour to make sure they are alright.
- Offering to do the shopping for someone who is housebound.
- Buying a tramp a sandwich.
- Inviting a lonely person round for a cup of tea, or a meal.
- Digging an old man's allotment.
- Giving way when you don't HAVE to.

And what's your reply? "Oh, I don't think I would like to do that!", "Why can't somebody else do it", "What's it got to do with me?" – Where would we be now if Jesus had taken any those views and had copped out and not gone through with it? Do you really think Jesus WANTED to die? If you do, read again Matthew 26 verse 29, where He asks His Father for the cup of suffering to be taken away from him, but then says "Now my will, but yours".

Now, let's go out into the world, to spread the love of God, not by telling people that God loves them, but by showing God's love by our actions.

Hymn StF 350 I cannot tell <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-K9rlyhg-LQ>

- 1 I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
should set his love upon us, now or then,
or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the wanderers,
to bring them back, they know not how or when.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary
when Bethlem's manger was his only home,
and that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.
- 2 I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
as with his peace he graced this place of tears,
or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
the crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
and lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,
for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.
- 3 I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
how satisfy the needs and aspirations
of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
and he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
and some glad day his sun shall shine in splendour,
when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.
- 4 I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
when at his bidding every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation
when every human heart with love is filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer :
'at last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King !'

Prayer

(With Sadness, from "Seeking Jesus" by Colin Ferguson)

We remember with sadness the suffering of so many people:

Suffering caused by wars that can never be won for they spawn the hatred and hurt of generations yet to come.

Suffering caused by hunger and disease which could have been avoided.

Suffering caused by those who are blinded by bigotry, racial hatred, religious intolerance.

Lord what terrible things are done in your name.

Help us make your love for all people known,

Show us how to bring your peace,

How to give all your world hope for the future.

We remember with sadness the way in which your church has divided itself as if one gift was the only gift.

Help us build the bridges that will make us work together for your kingdom and not just for our own vision of that glory.

We remember with sadness when we have not loved.

We pray for those with whom we are in any form of dispute.

Help us to forgive those who have hurt us and to pray for those whose behaviour causes us distress.

We pray for those who have sought gods of their own destruction in drink, drugs, violence and hatred.

We pray for those who are suffering serious illness, for those who are frightened of what is happening to them, for those who need God's loving touch in their life, especially those we know.

Finally Lord, we pray for ourselves that you may take us and help us to be the people you would like us to be.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Let us take a few minutes to pray with our concerns for other people. You may like to focus on one or more of the following, or someone else.

Our Government in these very difficult times

Our Health service

Our Education system

People who are still furloughed or having work from home

People who still are having to stay at home but are desperate for company

The people of St. Vincent, some of whom are friends or relatives of people in Reading.

We ask all of our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Hymn StF 418 We have a Gospel to proclaim

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TVTmq7THU4>

- 1 We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all throughout the earth ;
the gospel of a Saviour's name :
we sing his glory, tell his worth.
- 2 Tell of his birth at Bethlehem —
not in a royal house or hall,
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.
- 3 Tell of his death at Calvary :
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave.
- 4 Tell of that glorious Easter morn :
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.
- 5 Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.
- 6 Now we rejoice to name him King :
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim :
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Edward Joseph Burns (b.1938)

Blessing

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead,
strengthen us to walk with him in his risen life;
And may almighty God bless us,
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Alleluia!

Go in joy and peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Alleluia!