

Fourth Sunday of Easter † Sunday, 25 April 2021



In England & Wales Cycle of Prayer: New members of the Church – Prayer for Vocations
Keynote: Christ the Good Shepherd – the keystone of living

Acts of the Apostles 4: 8-12

The disciples are brought before the ruling council of the Sanhedrin, to explain their actions involving the healing of a cripple; the apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit replies to his interrogators, *'it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the one you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; by this name and by no other that this man is able to stand up perfectly healthy, here, in your presence, today.'* In these few words, Peter announces the fundamental belief of the Christian community of faith, that Jesus who died, lives again, and is able to bring healing and forgiveness to those who believe. *'This is the stone rejected by you the builders,'* says Peter *'but which has proved to be the keystone... of all the names in the world... this is the only one by which we can be saved.'* For Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, the secure foundation of our lives.

Responsorial Psalm 117 (118) – A processional song of thanksgiving in victory

First Letter of John 3: 1-2

For John the writer of this letter – often identified as the 'beloved disciple' – knowing God and being recognised or known by God is a theme close to John's heart. Just as in a family, the familiarity and blood ties that exist are effective signs of the bond of love and the identity of the family, so with God. *'Think of the love that the Father lavishes upon us,'* writes John, *'letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are.'* But the apostle knows from experience that because we belong to God, the world refuses to acknowledge us, just as it refused to recognise him. The true disciple cannot expect worldly recognition and if we're unsure, then the apostle John reminds us *'what we are to be in future has not yet been revealed; all we know is... we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is.'* For the 'beloved disciple', Jesus is at the very centre of his being and of his living – Christ is our guarantee. John would have us also to place Christ at the centre of our lives – as the keystone.

Gospel according to John 10: 11-18

For many folk these days, we never see the shepherd, let alone the sheep! But, all the same, this pastoral image – used so frequently in the scriptures – has a valid meaning for us. In the gospel today, the image of the good shepherd is in stark contrast with the mercenary nature of the hireling. The paid hireling only goes so far with the job, does just enough to get by, he has no love for the job, does it for the pay, and will happily abandon the task at the first opportunity. In contrast Jesus says: *'I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep... I know my own and my own know me... and I lay down my life for my sheep... they will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd.'*

There is a double message in this gospel passage. The vocation of shepherd is seen as noble and calling for dedication, perseverance and requires the pastor to be utterly reliable. On the other hand the disciple recognising the voice of the Lord must be ready to respond to the call of the true shepherd – Christ. On both counts this gospel passage suits the theme of Christian vocation today. It is for each of us to decide how best to respond to Christ to discern what our personal calling is, whether great or small.