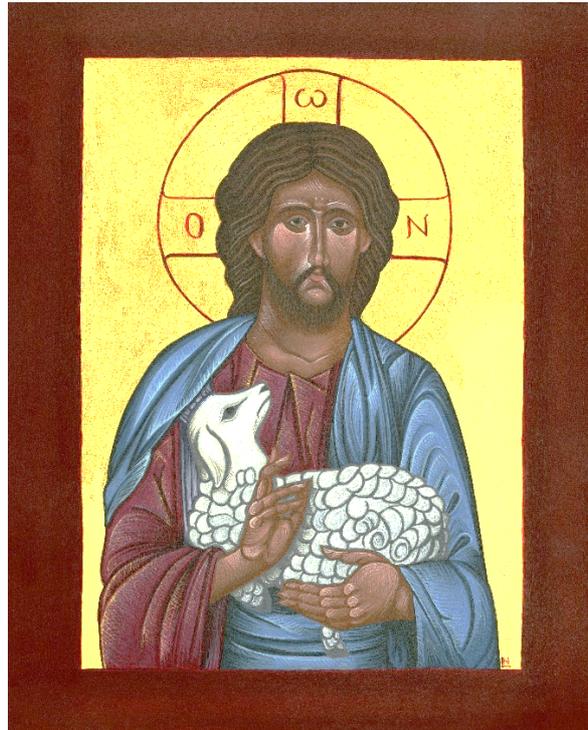


**Fourth Sunday of Easter
Sunday, 8th May 2022**



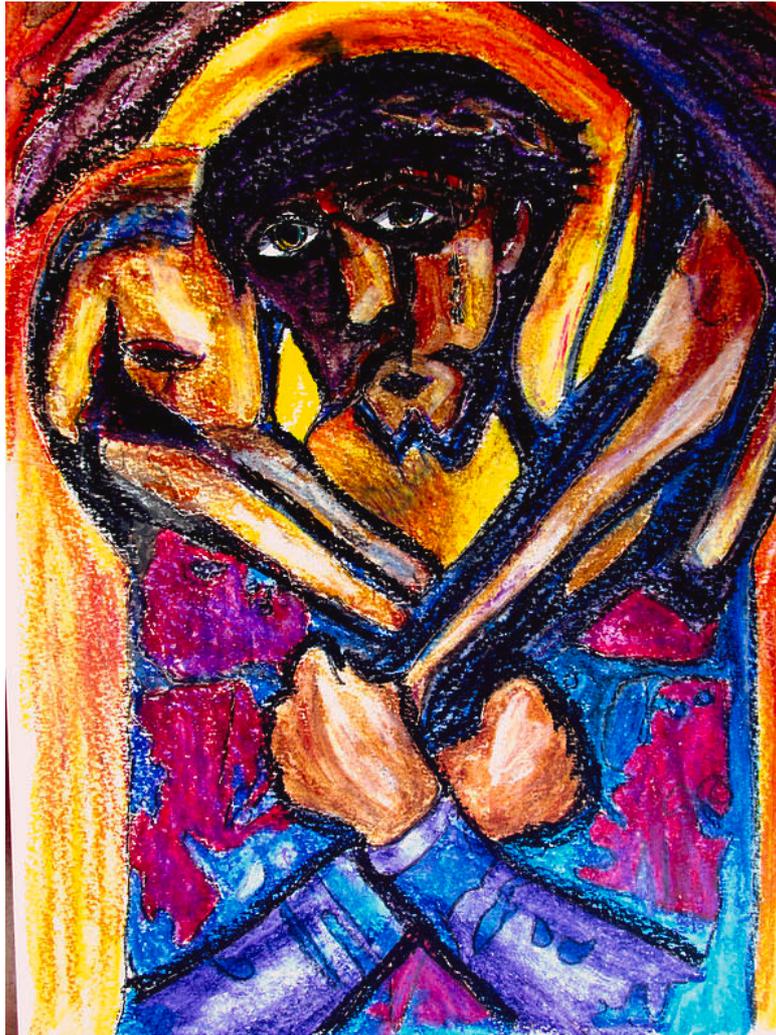
Dear Friends,

‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.’
(John 10: 27)

Earlier this week, I had the privilege of marrying a couple who had found true love in each other in their forties. Their evident love for each other radiated out to those of us lucky enough to witness them giving and receiving solemn vows and exchanging shiny bright golden rings.

As I explained the significance of their rings as a symbol of unending love, I asked them to return to this day in those moments when they would rather throw their wedding bands at each other than wear them with love and pride. These words clearly caught the attention of another couple in the congregation. Sitting at a distance from each other in their pew, I saw them turn to each other with a knowing look which flowered with forgiveness. It was moving to see them instinctively move closer to each other and hold hands as their bonds of love cleared whatever hurt had separated them hitherto.

In prayer during the Marriage service, we ask God to help couples live in His grace, showing each other gentleness and tenderness for their dreams and healing love for their wounds. Just as this couple had found in their moment of reconciliation, living with a sense of God’s peace for the other uppermost in our hearts, enables us all to show the world how to live in the unity of Christ’s love. *‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.’*

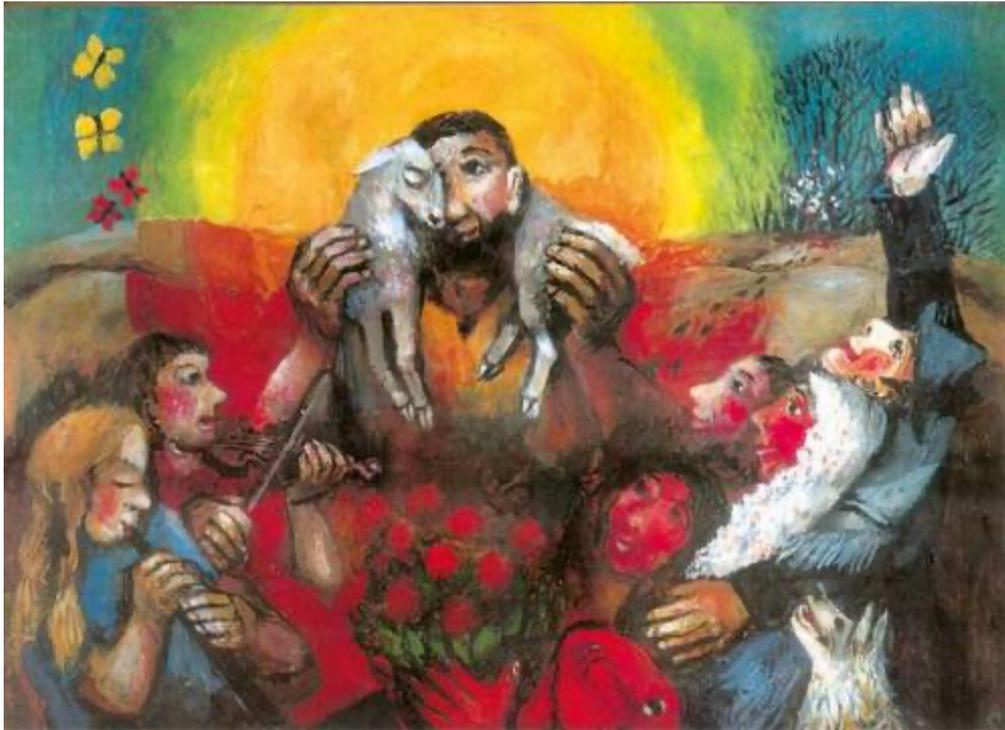


'The Good Shepherd' by Sarah Hornsby

Following on from last week's reading from the first part of Chapter 10 of John's Gospel, the shepherd theme continues apace. In this section we find part of an escalating conflict between Jesus and the Jews. From the magnificent opening chapter of his Gospel, John has hammered home the point that Jesus is the son of God. His personality, His miracles and His teachings make it clear that Jesus and God are one.

So, when Jesus has to say to the Jewish leaders that He has already told them who He is, we, the reader, know that Jesus has indeed answered the Jewish leaders' questions in all that He has said and done since His coming to earth.

How is it then that, despite seeing Jesus' miracles and hearing His teachings the religious leaders are still asking the same old questions? They are not so completely blind to the nature of God that they can deny Jesus, but, despite all their years of study of God, simply don't want Jesus to be telling the truth. Why? Because it suits them to keep God where they want Him; at a point where God doesn't make that much difference to their lives. They pay lip-service and carry on with their old ways. So, they keep hoping He will do or say something that will give them a clear conscience not to believe.



'The Good Shepherd' by Sieger Köder

But the truth is that God's purpose is salvation and that we are created to choose life, though that choice is genuinely ours. Living as Christians means that we live the way Jesus has shown us. But giving up our sinful and self-gratifying ways is tough and it is much easier to carry on with our old behaviour, harbouring all our old resentments than it is to live through the light of Christ.

The temptation is to get into something of an 'Ark' mentality which says that salvation is about getting people into safety and warmth and battering down the hatches.

One mark of following Jesus is in replicating His capacity for forgiveness. Even as He was being crucified, Jesus, contorted by pain, was yet able to forgive those who tortured Him. His very first words from the cross were *'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'* (Luke 23: 34)

In coming to earth and teaching us how to forgive past hurts and to instead love each other unconditionally, Jesus is offering us a greater salvation than the people were seeking. They had prayed to God for a leader who would protect them and release them from the oppression of Roman rule, but instead God sent His son, the Good Shepherd, to protect all who believe in Him from eternal harm. If we choose to follow Jesus, He will give us eternal safety.

What Jesus is saying is that our faith is not simply about getting into the Ark and being carried along, it is instead about letting the life of the Ark flow out into the world. His message today is that we choose life! In Christ, forgiving each other is a profound way by which to establish the Kingdom values of heaven here on earth. How many more wars do we need before we learn this truth?



'Jesus The Good Shepherd' by Gloria Ssali

'On forgiveness' by C S Lewis from 'The weight of glory.'

I find that when I think I am asking God to forgive me I am often in reality (unless I watch myself very carefully) asking Him to do something quite different. I am asking Him not to forgive me but to excuse me. But there is all the difference in the world between forgiving and excusing. Forgiveness says 'Yes, you have done this thing, but I accept your apology, I will never hold it against you and everything between us two will be exactly as it was before.' But excusing says 'I see that you couldn't help it or didn't mean it, you weren't really to blame ...'

Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the one who has committed it.

Yours in the safety of Christ,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

Collect for The Fourth Sunday of Easter

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.



John 10: 22-30 - Further Conflict Over Jesus' Claims

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'

Schedule of Services

Now that all national Coronavirus restrictions have been lifted, it is no longer necessary to book seats in our parishes for services. Neither is it mandatory for you to wear masks in church. However, Coronavirus is still very much with us. There are a number of people in our villages with it at present, so we are encouraging people to observe social distancing measures.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Ch</i>	<i>Cr</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Sp</i>	<i>Wh</i>
<i>8th May</i>			Holy Communion followed by APCM		Morning Prayer and Pet Service
<i>15th May</i>	Holy Communion	Morning Worship	6pm – Peace & Wholeness	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)	
<i>22nd May</i>			Christian Aid Morning Prayer Service	Morning Worship	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)
<i>26th May Ascension Day</i>			7.30am – Holy Communion followed by Breakfast in the Church Room		
<i>29th May</i>		5 th Sunday Benefice Holy Communion			
<i>5th June Pentecost / Whit Sunday / Platinum Jubilee</i>	Morning Prayer - for Her Majesty The Queen	Holy Communion	9.15am - Prayers for Her Majesty The Queen		
<i>12th June Trinity Sunday</i>	11am - Trinity Sunday Open-Air Benefice Service followed by BYO Benefice Picnic <i>(Northwood Park)</i>				
<i>19th June</i>	Holy Communion	Morning Worship	6pm - Peace & Wholeness	8am - Holy Communion (BCP)	
<i>22nd June</i>			Mid-week Holy Communion		
<i>26th June</i>	Thanksgiving Service for the Fete (<i>in the Fete Marquee</i>)		Morning Prayer	Morning Worship	8am – Holy Communion (BCP) PLUS 6pm – Spring Meditations