



T GETHER

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The Heart of Easter

Revd Sonia Hicks | President of the Methodist Conference

For me, the very heart of Easter is a story of liberation. Easter emerges from God's desire to set God's people free. The story of that liberating love begins with the Exodus of God's people from a place of enslavement that is from the land of Egypt and all it represents. Joseph, Pharaoh's henchman, devises a plan to ensure both the preservation of his kinspeople, from starvation, and the enslaving, through economic means, of the poorer Egyptians. At one point, the Egyptians cry out: "...There is nothing left in the sight of my Lord but our bodies and our lands. Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh..." [Gen. 47: 18-19]

When desperate people sell one child to feed the others, we see the devastation that economic enslavement can still do in our world today. Later, when the Israelites became numerous and prospered in Egypt, the Egyptians treated them harshly. Yet God was not deaf and blind to the harsh realities. God heard and God saw: "Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.'" [Exod.3: 7]

We worship the God who is as concerned with our physical wellbeing as our spiritual wellbeing. For God seeks our liberation in every aspect of our lives. And that is true for all of us, for each one of us. Therefore, God liberated the people of Israel out of slavery, out of bondage, out of despair. God, in the Exodus story, revealed what is at the heart of God. It is release from all that seeks to hold us enslaved - racism, sexism, homophobia, nationalism, pride, love of self. Liberation is at the centre of Easter.

Under Moses, God leads the people of Israel out of bondage into freedom. They travel with all that they possess into an unknown future. We have witnessed a similar exodus of people in Ukraine. In Exodus 12, we read that it was not just Israelites who left the land of captivity: "The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed crowd also went up with them..." [Exod 12: 37-38a] John Dobson in SPCK's A Guide to Exodus surmises that this mixed bunch might have included some Egyptians who had married Israelites as well as other people who had migrated from Palestine to Egypt and had become slaves. As people leave the advancing Russian forces in Ukraine, are we mindful that not all of them can be classified as Ukrainians? Is the heart of God therefore any less closed to them in their desperation and their anxiety? Yet our government seems oblivious that Ukraine was not only home to Ukrainians but also to foreign students, asylum seekers and foreign workers. If liberation is only for a few, what value does it have? If God's love is only for the people who think and act like me, does that love have currency in our broken world? In the second epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul writes: "...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself; not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us." [2 Cor. 5: 19]

For me, at the heart of Easter lies God's reconciling grace. It is God's open declaration that God is on our side against the forces of sin in all their forms. And because of that, God's people must be ready to stand against all the powers and the all the principalities that would seek to usurp the love of God for the whole of humanity. But we are not alone. The Holy Spirit strengthens us. Christ will be forever by our side. God will never leave us or forsake us. May we each seek to do the Will of God in our lives and in this world. AMEN



1. Online Service

Join us from 10:30am on Sunday for our online Circuit Service which this week is led by Revd Nathan Falla.

Find it on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/NewarkSouthwellMethodistCircuit>) why not invite a friend to watch it with you and share the link with them on your social media or by email!

2. Zoom Opportunities

If you're feeling isolated, are not ready to be face to face yet, or can't, but are happy to meet on Zoom, there is a weekly coffee time at 3pm on a Monday run by Charles Street but open to all, email Mel Watson for more details: mellwatson42@gmail.com.

There is also still a weekly Zoom fellowship called 'The Gathering' which is part of Southwell Methodist Church and run by Philip and Francine Holmes. You'd be most welcome, contact Philip to connect: philipholmes8100@gmail.com.

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also [online](#).)
08:10am – 8th May

Love took my hand

A celebration in music and word of the life and works of the priest and poet George Herbert, from the Chapel of St John's College, Cambridge.

The service is led by the Revd Dr Mark Oakley, who looks at Herbert's works in the context of the Easter season. The poems are read by members of the College, and the Chapel choir leads the congregation in a selection of works with Herbert's texts, including the hymns 'King of glory, King of peace', and 'Teach me, My God and King'.

4. Radio Nottingham

Listen every Sunday, at 8am, to a live church service on BBC Radio Nottingham. (Online or on 95.1-103.8 MHz FM for free.)

Knowing the Shepherd

Online Circuit Service Sermon | Revd Nathan Falla

Reading: Revelation 7:9-17 & John 10:22-30

Politics seems to be in the news for all the wrong reasons. Writing on the eve of local elections (although not in Newark & Southwell area) will the local political landscape change. Can we trust leaders and the manifestos of political parties?

Questions surrounding the ability to lead are not new! In the set Gospel reading, the Jews were wanting to know if Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, they wanted to know without a shadow of a doubt if he was their promised leader. Jesus replies, I did tell you but you did not believe. My manifesto is not in words but in deeds; in the miracles that I do in my Father's name. You didn't believe because you do not belong to me, you are not my sheep. This paraphrased version highlights that they could not see because they didn't believe.

What Jesus goes on to say is profound as it explores the relationship that the Jews are missing out on! This is a relationship based on mutual knowledge, which has the reward of eternal life and a promise of security and protection both from Jesus and from the Father because Jesus and the Father are one. What leadership qualities, what a manifesto!

Jesus being like a shepherd would have been a familiar metaphor to his listeners, it was a term used to describe some leaders in the Old Testament as they looked after the flock of Israel. Culturally though, they were seen as the lowest of the low: "indeed, in the time of Jesus shepherding was on a list of despised occupations. Shepherds lived on the margins of normal society – the demands of the job meant that they couldn't lead a predictable, stable life. So they were usually ritually unclean as far as temple worship was concerned, and were routinely considered dishonest as far as anything else was concerned. Nevertheless, Jesus transforms the contemporary meaning and emphasises the leading, guiding, providing and defending qualities of a shepherd from an Old Testament understanding when he declares earlier in the same chapter "I am the good shepherd".

Looking at our reading from Revelation, it gives us two pictures. First, we have the awe-inspiring sight of worship as the gathered assembly hold palm branches and shout aloud the praises of God, besides falling down and worshipping. Later on, we discover that these people have been through times of great testing and pain and there is a wonderful picture and a promise:

Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Here is a wonderful picture of comfort as the Lamb who was obedient to death becomes the shepherd who provides all that the people need. quenching their thirst, leading them to the source of eternal life and comforting them in their grief.

Our readings provide us with wonderful pictures of a shepherd who loves, cares and meets the need of the sheep. How do these relate to us and to our understanding and knowing the shepherd? I believe that our readings offer us three things that will enable us to know the Jesus the shepherd more, summoned, gifted and secure.

Summoned - The sheep know the masters voice, they are listening and are ready to respond when they hear the call then they obediently follow. The commentator Bruce Milne has written: "The call of Christ has brought them into a new relationship with him; a relationship which in turn leads to a new lifestyle." Listening leads to following but first we need to identify and distinguish the voice of the shepherd from all the other noise that is around us so that we can then listen and respond. For us to do this it is important to find times of quiet, to still ourselves and to really listen to God. We can hear God through reading the Bible, a verse of a hymn or something that somebody says. The small still persistent voice, that challenges and encourages. Today as you read this, are you listening, are you ready? On this Vocations Sunday, is God calling you into a new pathway of service, calling the church to something new? How will you respond? It took me well over a year to finally respond to God when I was called to the ministry; God was persistent and showed me that all things were possible. Has God been tapping on your shoulder for some time, is today another prompt? How will you respond?

Gifted - Jesus promises that all who follow him, all that are his sheep will have the gift of eternal life. We have a glimpse of what eternal life will be in Revelation with the unceasing worship, and God meeting our every need in a way that is almost too wonderful to imagine. This gift encourages us and gives us hope as there is a certainty, an assurance.

Secure - One of the most powerful images within both our readings is the protection and security that the shepherd provides; John records Jesus words "no-one can snatch them out of my hands," and then reiterates the point when he says "no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hands." What a promise, what a picture; we are safe, secure and protected in Jesus' hands if we are his sheep and follow him. No matter what we may go through, God is there, even though we may not be aware of it God is with us, helping us and sustaining us. God will quench our thirst, dry our tears and lead us to the springs of living water.

As you think about what you have read I invite you to imagine a field, in the field there is a shepherd and lots of sheep, some are following the shepherd, others are lagging behind a little and some are going the wrong way, one has got stuck in some nettles and is experiencing pain and is bleating loudly wanting to be rescued, another is slowly heading back into the flock within its head down. Where would you place yourself within this picture? Where would you like to be? Hear Jesus calling you, how will you respond? Will you accept God's gift of grace? Will you let the loving arms of the Shepherd enfold you that you may feel safe and secure? Is the Lord your shepherd?

Prayer Space

Collect for the 4th Sunday of Easter

Good Shepherd of the sheep,
by whom the lost are sought
and guided into the fold:
feed us and we shall be satisfied;
heal us and we shall be made whole;
and lead us, that we may be with you;
for you are alive and reign,
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Methodist Worship Book

Prayers for others

Loving God, Shepherd of your sheep
we pray for our world
for all those who have the responsibility
of leading and governing people
that they would do so wisely
and uphold human rights and freedom.

Loving God, Shepherd of your sheep,
we pray for those who hunger for love:
for the orphaned child,
the abandoned person,
the lonely and the oppressed
may they lie down
in the green pastures of your care.
We pray for those who thirst for peace:
for the victims of war and those who
actively seek an end to conflict
may they drink of you and find rest.
We pray for those whose spirits are weary:
for the church members who struggle to
keep their church going
may they be revived by you

Loving Shepherd of your sheep,
we remember before you those walking
through valleys of deepest darkness:
those who are ill;
those who are bereaved;
those overshadowed by guilt or
depression;
those who are lonely or afraid.
May they know that you are with them and
may they know the comfort of your
guiding, protecting and saving love.

Loving Shepherd of your sheep,
you have provided us with all that we
need.
You have blessed us richly.
We ask for grace and wisdom
to respond to your love and goodness
by putting our faith in you.
We ask for the grace and courage
to follow you along the path of self-giving
love all the days of our lives. Amen.

Hymns and worship songs

Songs chosen for inclusion in the YouTube service:

Come people of the risen King

All heaven declares – SOF 10, StF 293

Salvation belongs to our God – SOF 992

The Lord’s my Shepherd – SOF 1030, StF 481

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine – SOF 44, StF 548

Please click on the song title to access YouTube clip of each song.

Discussion Questions

Church is best done together but we know that this isn’t always possible - particularly if you’re housebound, isolated or even shielding. But why not contact a friend and arrange to watch the church service online or read the newsletter simultaneously and get in touch by telephone afterwards to talk about it. Below are some questions that might help you to reflect together!

1. Do you find the image of Jesus being the shepherd helpful? Why?
2. If the Gospels were written today, what imagery do you think Jesus would use?
3. What does it mean for you to say: “The Lord is my shepherd”?
4. What difference does it make when you put the emphasis on different words?
The Lord is my shepherd
The Lord is my shepherd
The Lord is my shepherd
The Lord is my shepherd
5. In what ways have you known God’s call, the gifts that God offers, and God’s protection?

EMAIL PRAYER CHAIN



If you would like to join a prayer chain and receive prayer requests or to submit a prayer request (with permission of the recipient) please get in touch with Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com. It is for those of any church or none!

In person worship across the Circuit during the next four weeks...

March - May 2022		8th May 4th of Easter Vocations Sunday	15th May 5th of Easter Christian Aid	22nd May 6th of Easter Aldersgate Sunday	29th May 7th of Easter Sunday in Ascensiontide
Balderton	8:30 am				
	10:30 am	LA	Bates	Dalby	A Trowbridge
	6:00 pm				
Charles Street	8:30 am				
	10:30 am	L Blatherwick	Mathews	LA	Falla HC
	6:00 pm	Bates	Hibberts	Falla HC	Mathews
Collingham	10:45 am	Bates	Morley ChAid / US	Hall	United Service at Parish Church HC
Elston	10:45 am	Hibberts HC		LA	
Hope Community	10:30 am	Falla Breakfast at H'ville / 9am	Dalby at B'gate	Falla HC / at H'ville	LA at B'gate
Long Bennington	10:30 am	Dalby T	L Blatherwick	Hart HC	Ward T
North End	6:00 pm	Falla	Bates	LA	Hibberts
North Muskham	10:30 am	Hart HC		Hibberts	K Trowbridge
	2:00 pm		Hibberts Café		
Southwell	10:30 am	LA	Hibberts HC	Hardy	Winnington
	Other	Hibberts PicC / 2pm	Morley HC / 4pm	Hibberts Fringe / 6pm	Falla 4pm
Sutton-on-Trent	10:30 am	LA Breakfast / 9am	Falla HC	US at Parish Church / 10am	Hibberts at Tuxford Café / 2pm

I am not alone | Carla Maurer

I look at the green grass in the fields
and the bright flowers in the meadows
and I know:

I am not alone.

I rest in the shadow of a willow tree
and drink water from a deep blue lake
and I know:

I am not alone.

I look up to the sky from the highest mountain
and watch the birds and the clouds and the sun
and I know:

I am not alone.

Even in my darkest hours,
in the valley of fear and death,
I know that your beautiful creation
will provide me with everything I need
and feed me with new hope.

You will never let me fall.