



# KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

Easter 4

10am – Sunday 3 May 2020

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This service can be accessed from the Knox Church YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYksSjG0If00NeogNIGs7A>

or, after the live service concludes, from the Knox Church website <https://knoxchurch.net/>

## Pre service music from around 9.45 am

## Welcome and call to worship based on +++

### Hymn

(tune Crimond) - Psalm 23, *The Scottish Psalter*, 1923

1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.  
He makes me down to lie  
in pastures green: he leadeth me  
the quiet waters by.

4 My table thou hast furnishèd  
in presence of my foes;  
my head thou dost with oil anoint,  
and my cup overflows.

2 My soul he doth restore again;  
and me to walk doth make  
within the paths of righteousness,  
even for his own name's sake.

5 Goodness and mercy all my life  
shall surely follow me:  
and in God's house for evermore  
my dwelling-place shall be.

3 Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,  
yet will I fear none ill:  
for thou art with me; and thy rod  
and staff me comfort still.

## Opening prayer, assurance of forgiveness and the announcement of peace

### Children - Jordan Redding

### Readings – read by Jamie Marra

#### Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## **John 10:1-10**

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

## **Anthem**

### **Reflection "Pastures Green"**

Prayer - Gracious shepherd, help us hear your voice and bring us through the gate to abundant life. In Christ we pray. Amen.

On Tuesday, as New Zealand moved from level 4 to level 3, we entered a different world, more like the old world.

The noise grew and spread and echoed across the valleys and became our background again. It drowned out the sounds we'd heard over recent weeks— the birds, the wind in the trees, the dogs barking, and it took the silence.

Returning is important for rebuilding businesses and putting people to work so they can earn and eat.

And yet, for some there was a reluctance, a nervousness about returning -

- We haven't finished the list of home jobs;
- We feel more safe distanced from others;
- We don't want to go back because the old way had its challenges;
- We've prayed more, meditated more, were quiet more and we don't want to leave that behind;
- We were anxious before anyway and this gave us time to recentre our lives.

A nervousness.

What if that nervousness arises from a deeper longing, a more significant unease, carrying a call to greater wholeness?

Jesus uses two images – shepherd and gate - and gives us choices, choices about whether and what we leave, how we leave, and what we make of where we go.

In my Bible, chapter 10 in the gospel of John is headed "the good shepherd".

In the original Bible there were no headings or chapters or verses.

It was clear that the stories today continued the one before.

The one before is about Jesus healing a man born blind and being castigated for doing so.

People couldn't imagine healings like this especially on the sabbath so they wouldn't allow it or those who talked about it.

They drove out the man born blind.

But the man born blind could see what they could not see.

He became a follower of Jesus and he became part of a community of followers.

Jesus says that the shepherd knows his sheep and calls them out, which is exactly what Jesus did to the man born blind.

And maybe he is doing it again, to us, now.

Knowing us, the world we inhabit, what we are going through, and what our world might be, perhaps Jesus is trying to open our eyes, to lead us to pastures green.

Perhaps COVID-19 is part of that call.

There has been talk of the virus as the enemy that needs to be conquered.

If we were thinking in terms of the shepherd story, the virus would be the bandit or the thief that steals the sheep and threatens their life.

That kind of image is used to galvanise us into action, to unite us against a deadly foe, to give us a sense of how much is at stake.

But what if there is a deeper call in this virus?

An enemy is something to be fought, resisted, pushed away.

But what if the virus is more a messenger, a courier, a sharp prod?

Not that the virus was sent by God, but in the midst of it, what if the shepherd is calling us out? Thomas Friedman in the New York Times asks whether Mother Nature is telling us that we have let things get out of balance, that we have ravaged ecosystems, that we need to get back into balance, starting with using the immune system we have.

Friedman wonders if it is a call to see our body in a different way, less like a self-contained vessel, defined by our genetic code and ruled by our brain, and more like “a microbial ecosystem that sweeps along in atmospheric currents, harvesting gases, bacteria, phages, fungal spores, and airborne toxins in its nets.”

What if the virus is a call to restore the balance of our world?

Jesus said - “I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

He pictures sheep coming and going safely, thriving in green pastures.

Friedman reminds us that as people farmed and foraged, dipped their hands in common bowls and greeted one other with a touch, they engaged in rituals that bound them together with their neighbours and other organisms.

This is not a call away from washing and wiping and physical distancing.

But a call to recognise that we are microbially connected with each other and with this earth, and that the call is to live in pastures green, with all that that picture evokes and with all the microbes pastures have.

Acts 2 describes a church living that vision, embodying that call.

All who believed were together and had all things in common.

A people so caught up in the life of Jesus that they became a community where people shared what they had, where life in the temple and life at home was one, where they ate with glad and generous hearts, and there was a constant flow of people, coming and going, safely and freely, growing in Spirit.

So is COVID-19 really an enemy or is it a messenger?

And if a messenger, is it bringing us the call to be a community that embodies the vision of a world in balance, green pastures, here, now?

A prayer – Jesus, shepherd, lead us out. Jesus, gate, be our way. Jesus, life, nourish abundant life. Amen.

## **Prayer for others and the Lord's Prayer – led by Gregor Macaulay of Opoho Presbyterian Church**

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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

### **Hymn**

1 Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
let me be as Christ to you,  
pray that I may have the grace  
to let you be my servant too.

2 We are pilgrims on a journey,  
we are travellers on the road,  
we are here to help each other  
walk the mile and bear the load.

from Alleluia Aotearoa - Richard Gillard

3 I will hold the Christ-light for you  
in the night-time of your fear,  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
speak the peace you long to hear.

4 When we sing to God in heaven,  
we shall find such harmony,  
born of all we've known together  
of Christ's love and agony.

### **Blessing**

We continue to appreciate all tithes, gifts and offerings. Our bank account number is 03 0903 0016425 00 and our charity number for tax rebate purposes is #CC52318.