**New Kilpatrick**

**John 10:1-15**

**8th May 2022**

**Gathering**

The good shepherd

the one who tends us

guides us into pastures

who recognises the sounds of our names

The good shepherd

The one who bends to heal us

travels through the deepest valleys with us

who gives up everything for us all

The good shepherd

The one whose rod and staff comfort us

whose strength and love holds us

whose cup of love runneth over

The good shepherd

and we will dwell

in the house of the Lord

forever

Let us gather here

God’s People

in God’s love

for God’s world

**Introduction**

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish… and once more… thank you for the invitation to be with you today… This Sunday traditionally has the title of Good Shepherd Sunday…and we take some of those well known and well loved passages in the Bible where Jesus describes his role in terms of a shepherd… the irony being shepherds were never liked and never trusted in biblical times… yet the image of a shepherd… and the care and cost of shepherding… was an image offered of kings and leaders… So that is where we are today… on the hillside… with the sheep… being led by the shepherd…

**Prayer**

Shepherding God

In this pasture

This place of peaceful community

We bring all we are

All we know about ourselves

All we describe ourselves to be

And lay it here

In this place of loving presence

And generous providing

In this pasture

This place of running streams

We bring our questions

And frustrations

All that makes us hesitate

All that prevents us from abundant living

And lay it here

In this place of grace

And forgiveness

In this pasture

This pausing place in our living

May we meet you

The abundant shepherd

May you lift the burdens

And guide the lost

Forgive the hurt

And renew our hope

May we meet you

As we are

And in such a place

Shaped by love

Be affirmed

That we might live again

With a life abundantly shared

And generously offered

In this pasture

This meeting place

We bring our lives

And all we can give

That we might shape

A new relationship in the world

That recreates

Resurrects

All we can be

Hear us in the global prayer

**Reading**

“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. **2**The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. **3**The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4**When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. **5**They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” **6**Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

**7**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.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

**Quiet Time**

So let us make space here

A sacred space

To bring all we are

To the good shepherd

Here let us pause

In the green pastures and still waters

Of our faith

Where we find words of abundance and generosity

Overflowing

That here

Souls are restored,

Renewed in a love that never lets us go-

Where we can turn

And turn again

Towards a path that God calls right

And who is our companion io it -

Here let us pause

When the time of shadows comes

When the colours of life drain

And we feel alone

In this place

Let us pause

In a presence

A comfort

Made in a promise

To move always closer beside us

Through every valley an glen-

A place in which to pause and trust

The blessings we have

Overflow with love

Banqueting tables

Are abundant with life

Let us make space here

In this place

And wait

Knowing

Goodness and mercy

Are our companions all the days of our lives

And we will dwell

In love’s presence

Forever

**Reflection**

I filled in my postal vote this week… and sent it off in the post… the postbox was full… probably of everyone else’s postal votes… We’ve had local elections here… and while the emphasis is meant to be on local… it is also a barometer for what we think nationally about leadership and how we feel about ourselves as a country… and what level or optimism we have…

And it just so happens… that the passage we are given for this Sunday is about the Good Shepherd… which is well timed when many have a sense that good shepherds… in our societal and national life seem quite scarce… yet the promises of what Jesus offers as a good shepherd… are more desperately needed… than they have been for a long time… especially given we are worn out by pandemics, anxiety, conflict, uncertain cost of living…

Jesus is good at pictures… and he creates two pictures here… One of the good shepherd… and the second of the bandits and hire hands… and he compares them with the shepherd and they don’t come off well… especially the hired hands… and that’s a particular insight for us today…

Hired hands… unlike the bandits… aren’t out to destroy the sheep… they will quite happily look after them… do what they are paid for doing… but they won’t go as far as risking their lives for the sheep… That’s not in the contract… They are paid hands… they have a significant job… but they don’t actually need to care for the sheep…

Can we pause there and think a little more about that… institutions and people with important roles… but little regard for the sheep…

We can all think of our own examples… but there are a few less obvious ones to me… that share our relationships and communities…

One is the idea we need to buy our way out of our economic woes at the moment… Marketing is always going to be important.. .and the church does it too… we call it mission… but how it works… in then church too… is to convince us we are inadequate… we are missing something… and such and such a product… or belief… will fill that space…

So it becomes less about sharing information… and more about creating a sense of inadequacy… and drives us to respond to that feeling by consumption… of retail… of politics… or belief…

That’s found too in the dominance of social media… connection is good… but these companies dob[t see the value in just connecting us… but monetising that connection… using sophisticated algorithms created and designed to find out your tendencies and prejudices and amplifying them… offering more and more similar content generated to keep you on screen… and inviting likes and followers which actually create again that deep sense of insecurity and self-absorption…

And do we need to reflect on politics… and the polarisation and division that is constantly created… where we tend to define ourselves in terms of what we are against… that’s negative politics… breeds opposition and hatred… an again creates a false narrative of fear… and insecurity… The constant message is you are not enough…

Well that’s not according to the Good Shepherd who is constantly saying… you are enough… enough that I am willing to lay down my life for you… enough that I am willing to sacrifice for you… enough that this truth is all you need…

May we allow ourselves to be propelled by this truth… to shape our communities round this truth… to reclaim who we are as a church so different from the world’s institutions… those hired hands who don’t see care as essential to their work… let us reclaim the church: a society, a community, that claims, and lives and recognises, you are, we are, enough… that the Good Shepherd will lay down his life for each of us… we are enough…

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

Creating God

Thank you for the love you have surrounded us with

That holds us

And cares for us

And knows our needs

We pray for those

Whose place in the world

Has not offered such comfort

Those who live in Mariupol

Those besieged by attacks because they are Ukrainian

And those who hunger

Because of accident of birth

That they were born in places

Where the scales are tipped against them

Where prejudice and climate and economy

And not in their favour

Those who risk everything

Fleeing from conflict or violence

And travel as refugees

To unknown places

Because of someone else’s ambition for power

Or fear or hatred

From Rohingya to Syrian

Creating God

Shepherd of the sheep

Such a pastoral image comforts us

We who can afford such comfort

Who live lives in rich countries

We pray for those who don’t

And for those in our own communities

Whose poverty shows us

How fragile our own structures are

Shepherd

Guide us all into pastures that are abundant

Shared

Given over to the least

May we not accept the comforts until all are comfortable

May we live towards this vision

Rather than believe we live in it now

And as we bring our families and friends

Those we know who are ill

Physically and mentally

Those frightened of life and the future

We pray our words

Become acts

And our prayer a way of living

So be it

Amen

**Epilogue**

The Lord *is* my shepherd;  
I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul;  
He leads me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name’s sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil;  
For You *are* with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
All the days of my life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
Forever.

**Benediction**