A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Many were baptized and were added to the community. 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.

Acts 2.42–47

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

Jesus said to the Pharisees: ‘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.’

John 10.1–10
FOR OUR PRAYERS

Those who are ill or in need: Saschin Shah; Michael Green; Jenny Smith; Sarah Pitman; Hilary Brazier; Joyce Smith;
Pray also for those who have the COVID-19 virus and those who are working to treat them, particularly those members of Christ Church who work for the NHS.

Those who have died: Cynthia Aird; Rufus Crompton; Jolene Naylor; Mary Fox.
We also pray for those known and unknown who have died from the COVID-19 virus

Those whose anniversary of death falls this week: Brian Skelton (2004)

Link Parish of St Francis of Assisi, Barham Green, Zimbabwe

NEXT SUNDAY 10 MAY 2020
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

I have always loved our first reading – that endearing snapshot of the life of the early Church in all its seeming simplicity; the gathering of these new Christians as they concentrate on what they are called to be and to do. I’ve often gone back to this story when I have felt that church life has become too complicated and weighed down with its own trivial and unimportant concerns. The times we are going through now give us pause for thought as we have to decide what is important – and what is not. What it is that we are called to do and to be?

Then today’s Gospel is another story where we go back to basics, when Jesus talks to the disciples about animals very familiar to them – sheep – and helps them to think about the Good Shepherd. The shepherd’s care for his sheep is a frequent theme – Jesus has compassion for the crowds who are like sheep without a shepherd or who are sent out into the midst of wolves. In John 10, the shepherd does not seek what is lost but keeps his sheep safe from all dangers – even being willing to give his life for them. So, if we truly believe that Jesus the Good Shepherd keeps us, his sheep, safe from all dangers – and proved it by giving up his life for us – why is it that we are not stronger and more confident in that knowledge? Why are we, so often, people who can show weakness, who sometimes seem to have little strength of faith?

Today’s Gospel reveals a God who is not out to get us, to steal from us or put us down. He is not in the business of destructive behaviour; he does not want to wear us down with guilt or demand of us more than we can possibly give. Of course, for some, the Church of today can give that impression and sounds the sheep racing away in alarm. But in choosing the image of the shepherd, Jesus reminds us that he cares for each one of us as a shepherd knows his sheep and cares passionately for them – so they can feel safe in his care. The shepherd is someone whom the sheep must trust, and who will provide wisely and faithfully for those in his care. For us that means we can live our lives trusting in the shepherd without panic or confusion. It’s true of sheep – watch a field of them and they all rush around, frightened at the slightest disturbance. But when the shepherd is there they quickly calm down. Human beings are so much like sheep in a way – we do easily panic and scatter – and in these unprecedented days we might be forgiven for panicking even more than usual, particularly when faced with a dreadful situation over which we have little or no control. Sometimes it is the smallest thing which can knock us off course.

Yet we need to remember that our shepherd is both strong and gentle at the same time, for strength does not mean aggression. The shepherd has to be strong to guard his sheep against those predators who would kill them – but he also has to be gentle with his sheep as he cares for them and keeps them safe from harm. We know that, through everything, God is strongly protecting us with great gentleness – he knows what we are going through and he will not let go of us. And so we, for our part, have to do our best to remain strong in the faith and always to trust in the Good Shepherd, taking encouragement from those first Christians who devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

We pray for their families who mourn and give thanks for their lives. Their funerals will be private but it is hoped to be able to hold appropriate gatherings at Christ Church at a later date.

STEWART SANSON writes to say that Judith has dementia and is still unsteady on her feet. He has to move her to a safer place nearer their daughter. He had hoped to wheel Judith up to the Church to greet friends but it was not to be. They will both treasure the friends they made in Christ Church and are sorry to leave such a beautiful Church. It has a special resonance for Judith whose father, Edward Ashford, was the priest here; his photo hangs in the vestry. Stewart asks you not to phone or write as he has so much to do. They will ‘sample’ Churches in Letchworth before deciding where to worship. The standard against which they will be judged is that of Christ Church! Their new contact details will be circulated as soon as they are known. We wish them both well and assure them of our prayers, good wishes and thanks for all they have given to the life of Christ Church.

TRAIDCRAFT COOKIES AVAILABLE: Tish Mousell has available the nice cookies that we sell. She will put them out in her porch every morning and if anyone is passing 56 Lambton Road, help yourselves and pop a donation through her front door.

MY RAYNES PARK FESTIVAL ONLINE Spiritual Practices in the Age of Corona - 6 May 8–9pm
Father Christopher Jamison & Dr Roger Bretherton join us online to discuss how spiritual practices can benefit wellbeing and mental health during this difficult time.

The discussion will be led by Professor Mark Knight, from the University of Lancaster, using Zoom. Booking and details: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/spiritual-practices-in-the-age-of-corona-tickets-103038874046?fbclid=IwAR5l1IAINGXnxwXHz7851wReWE4ikKROAC1?h=1v8ElRCaNA0JfFwGyXZjY

PARTNERING IN PRAYER WITH A ROCHA KENYA

Pray for the staff in these sad and difficult times as they try to adjust and come up with new strategies. Most of the staff are now working from home and those who can’t are on leave. Please pray for staff to be calm and to be able to rest. Pray that God will give wisdom to the management at A Rocha as they try to work out how to continue their work in conservation and education. They are praying for Christ Church.

DIG DEEP Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

Last October, Christ Church donated our Harvest Collection of £62.43 to Dig Deep who work in the south west of Kenya to improve access to clean water and sanitation using the 3Ts - Taps, Toilets and Training. Dig Deep are responding to the COVID-19 crisis by installing emergency hand-washing facilities in critical areas where a lot of people gather, such as at markets. They plan to have reached 40,000 people to promote hand-washing in just the next 2 weeks. Their local team are training Community Health Volunteers to deliver accurate and practical advice about staying safe from the virus. For more information see the blog post at https://www.digdeep.org.uk/