



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 21st April 2024
The Fourth Sunday of Easter
Staying in Contact

The Very Revd Rod Reid - Incumbent (*usual rest day Monday*)

Email: bockingchurch@gmail.com Call: (01376) 324887 www.stmarys-bocking.com
or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday April 21st	8am	Said Mass
Sunday April 21st	10am	Sung Mass
Wednesday April 24th	9.30am	Said Mass
Sunday April 28th	8am	Said Mass
Sunday April 28th	10am	Sung Mass

424

375

Praise good St. George

656A

Panfield Church

Sunday April 21st	6pm	BCP Evensong
Tuesday April 23rd	5pm	Evening Prayer/Office Hour
Sunday April 28th	11am	Holy Communion

Gospel Acclamation

I am the good shepherd, says the Lord. I know my own sheep, and my sheep know me.

NOTICES

Charity of the Month - In April, the monies given at Tea & Coffee after the main service at St Mary's will go to Roundwood. The total raised for Essex Air Ambulance last month was £135, thank you!

Funeral - Agnes' funeral will take place on Wednesday 24th April 10.30am at Three Counties Crematorium, with the wake following in the Church Hall. The family warmly invite friends to join them for the service. There will be a number of us leaving from St Mary's at 10am if you would like a lift.

Friendly Friday Cafe - The Café had paused for an Easter break, but we are pleased to say that it is now back up and running every Friday until the middle of July. Why not pop in and bring a friend too?

Electoral Roll - If you have joined St Mary's recently it is likely you are not on our Electoral Roll. Indeed there may be others who have been meaning to do so, but not taken up the chance. Ahead of the APCM on May 19th, we are inviting you to join now. A short form is at the back, which is easy to fill in.

May Day! - Angela Fuller and the team on the tombola are inviting any items for it to be brought to church in the coming days, and no later than next Sunday. Thank you in advance.

Monday May 6th - May Day helpers needed! Please save the date and help us make this the most successful year yet. The more volunteers we have, the more stalls/games we can run.

Volunteers needed - Baby Stuff Braintree provide pre-loved clothes and equipment 0-5. We operate from the Carousel Centre, Chapel Hill, Braintree on Tuesday and Thursday morning. New volunteers

needed. If interested then please contact Dr Gervase Vernon, gervase@jgvernon.co.uk.

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Brenda Dunstone, Barry and Janice Goody, Jean Goodwin, Sue, Roger, Frances, Jo Meech, and Tony & Ann. We remember our care homes Millard House, Larchwood, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Braintree Mews, St Mary's Court and The New Deanery, and the following, whose anniversary of their passing falls this week Elizabeth Ware, Jack Jobson, Eileen Pudney, Edwin Stone, Thomas Worthington, Reginald Vaizey (Priest), David Huit, Stanley Pryke and Kendra Cook.

The 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.

Epistle Reading - Acts 4:5-12

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is "the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone." There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

Gospel Reading - John 10:11-18

'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. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.'

Address

Although I can't be sure of the details, I have a clear recollection of a picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd hanging in my bedroom when I was a young boy. A Google search inevitably brings up a multitude of images, some of which could have been the one I was familiar with from childhood. In some ways it was a strange image for someone growing up in the early 1950s in a Manchester that was only just recovering from the devastation wrought by the Second World War. There were green spaces nearby; we lived just across the road from a small park with football pitches, tennis courts and flower beds. But there were no sheep or shepherds in the immediate vicinity – though there must have been some on the foothills of the Pennines, clearly visible from home.

I became more aware of sheep and shepherds in one of the small Derbyshire parishes where I was Priest-in-Charge in the latter years of my full-time ministry. One of my Churchwardens at Kirk Langley was a sheep farmer. Looking after the sheep was a fulltime job not merely for him but also his wife and even more his daughter. My wife and I occasionally visited with our grandson who, at the age of just over five, was entrusted with the job of bottle feeding a lamb which, for some reason or other, was not able to be fed by its mother. On reflection, one of things that stood out from these visits was the bond between farmer and sheep. Sheep farming ultimately was a business and there was no point in getting too sentimental. If the business failed, it was not just the farmer and his family who suffered, but also the sheep themselves. Yet there was also a sense of going beyond what was perhaps strictly necessary for the business to succeed: the sheep were almost family members.

I'm not aiming to equate my one-time Churchwarden/sheep farmer with the Good Shepherd of today's Gospel. Nor I am convinced that laying down one's life for the sheep would necessarily be the best way of protecting them. You can't do much to stop the wolves if you are dead. But I think it is worth trying to comprehend the sort of bond between shepherd and sheep that is referenced in today's reading and that can require a genuine sacrifice, though hopefully not to point of laying down one's life.

The image of the shepherd and the sheep is a recurring one in the Bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) the prophet Ezekiel has stern words to say against the shepherds (religious leaders) who are too busy taking care of themselves to be bothered either to feed their flocks or to go in search of those who are lost. There is a sharp contrast between the good shepherd and the bad shepherd. Too many of those who came before Jesus fell into the latter category.

So when Jesus spoke about himself as the 'good shepherd', his words would have struck a chord with those of his hearers who were familiar with the scriptures. Perhaps here was the one they had long looked for and who was going to rescue God's chosen people from those who oppressed them just as a good shepherd would rescue his sheep from the wolves and other wild beasts prowling outside the sheepfold. It is perhaps more doubtful whether or not his first hearers would fully take on board his statement that the good shepherd must lay down his life for the sheep – and then take it up again. Perhaps that sounded too much like a riddle until the events of the first Easter brought a new perspective.

I think the image of Jesus (and therefore God) as the 'Good Shepherd' can be made to work in twenty-first century Essex. I suspect many of us might feel reassured to think that we are held by one who not only cherishes us but who is also able to offer protection and refuge. But does that also mean that we are therefore sheep? That is, perhaps, a somewhat more difficult concept. Sheep don't get a particularly good press. A common adjective to describe them is 'silly'. So are we also silly? Or are we just a bit helpless, needing protection and guidance from a strong mentor? None of this seems to fit very well with the modern mantra that we each have infinite potential and can be whatever we want to be. It is a frame of mind summed up in the popular funeral hymn (often disliked by clergy) 'My Way' or more forcibly by the folk singer Grace Petrie's imagined letter to her younger self: 'Be strong, be resilient, be young, be brilliant'. That, at least, is a message that I suspect many parents would want to give to their children. In many ways it is a good message. We want our children, or our grandchildren, to succeed in whatever it is they want to make of themselves (provided of course that it is legal). At the end of the Baptism service the congregation says to the newly baptized, 'Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father'. Our calling involves being seen, not hiding away in a corner.

All this is well enough, but it leaves me with a slight sense of something lacking. As his ministry neared

its earthly end, God's words to his beloved son might have been, 'be denied, be betrayed, be crucified'. That is not what any of us want for ourselves or for those whom we love or for whom we care. But it was the path that the Good Shepherd had to tread. He did indeed have to lay down his life for the sheep; even if the Easter message is that he not only took it up again but opened the way for all believers to have the possibility of eternal life. The Good Shepherd was (and is) also the suffering servant.

Does any of this have any relevance to the lives that we lead here and now in Bocking or wherever it might be that we have come from today to worship and enjoy fellowship in this place? I think it does. To some extent, we are all sheep. We are in need of some degree of protection from the hazards of everyday life. That protection cannot be total – life is not like that – but a firm faith and trust in the one who gave himself that the world might be saved can lead to acceptance of that which cannot be changed as well as hope that some change is possible. We will not be left to go astray unless we are particularly stubborn sheep. Even then, the Good Shepherd will keep searching for us.

Some may also be called to be shepherds. In verse 16 of today's reading we hear Jesus speak of 'other sheep who are not of this fold'. They also must be brought into the sheepfold where there is not just safety but also the possibility of living a more fulfilled life. A proper understanding of what Jesus was saying when he called himself the Good Shepherd will inevitably lead to a church that sees mission as an essential part of its calling. Not all are called to be shepherds, or indeed to have a leadership role. But for those who are, reflecting on just what Jesus meant when he spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd, should be an essential part of preparation for ministry. It is a great privilege to be called to be a shepherd in the church. It is also demanding and needs to be sustained both by prayer and by the support of the flock being shepherded.

None of this need stop anyone striving to be the best that they can be; or stop parents encouraging children to aim high and 'be brilliant'. But it does suggest that knowing that we are all in the care of the Good Shepherd may help us reflect on the reality of our dependence on Him if we truly to be what God wants us to be. Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection,
and give us grace to follow in his steps;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

You can scan this QR code with
your phone at anytime and
make a donation to the church.

Open your camera app, hold it
over the QR code and then
click 'open link' Thank you

