



## ***Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 21st, 2024***

### ***The Fig Tree Worship Resource***

#### **Call to worship & Lighting the Candle**

Come, let us worship God.

In pastures green,  
**The Good Shepherd leads us.**

Beside still waters,  
**The Good Shepherd leads us.**

Through darkest valleys and turbulent times,  
**The Good Shepherd leads us.**

Let us meet the Good Shepherd  
here in this moment together.

- ***Psalm 23***

***Light the candle***

In Christ, the Risen One, the light who has come,  
we meet the Good Shepherd.  
The one who comes to lead and guide us.

#### **Acknowledging**



***Uniting Aboriginal and Islander  
Christian Congress***

As we gather, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these unceded land and waters. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging. As First and Second Peoples walking together, we commit ourselves to be people of the covenant, listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.

#### **Singing - The Lord's my shepherd, TiS 10**

OR: The king of love my shepherd is, TiS 145

#### **Prayer**



In adoration and confession, let us pray:

God, who is the Risen Christ,  
You are our cornerstone.  
In you we live and breathe and have our being.

In becoming one with us,  
you opened the way to learn more about you,  
your magnificent creation,  
ourselves,  
and about the way you invite us  
to love one another,  
taking part in the world with you.

In teaching new ways,  
you inspire and encourage us  
to care for those in the margins.  
Those who fall through the cracks  
in our society and systems.  
Opening ourselves to loving without reservation,  
even when that seems difficult.  
Challenging our understandings,  
in the same way Jesus  
challenged views of the day.

In dying and rising you created for us a new way.  
A new chance to meet you afresh,  
reminding us of the gift we have received  
in and through you.

Yet sometimes we get so caught up in moment,  
that we forget everything you came for.  
We forget all you taught us  
about loving one another,  
living in community,  
the delights of your creation  
and the gift of your eternal grace  
and divine love.

We lose sight of the life you call us into,  
and the invitation to participate  
in your mission in the world.

God of the new promise,  
the one who shepherds us.  
Open our eyes to see you afresh.  
Expand our love for those around us.  
Enable us by your grace  
to live out your teachings,  
so all whom we encounter  
may meet you through our words and actions.  
**Amen.**



## ***Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 21st, 2024***

### ***The Fig Tree Worship Resource***

In Christ and through Christ we are united with the God who loves us. Therefore know that you are loved and forgiven.

#### ***Passing the peace***

---

May the Peace of God dwell with you:  
**and also with you.**

#### ***Listening***

---

Read: Acts 4: 5-12

Psalm 23, (from memory maybe?)

John 10: 11 - 18

For these words of faith  
and for Jesus the Word

**Thanks be to God.**

#### ***Reflecting -***

---

*"Soul restorations"*

Readers of classics and film buffs will be familiar with the opening scene of Thomas Hardy's 'Far from the madding crowd'. Gabriel Oak is an up- and-coming sheep farmer. He lives close to the animals and cares for them. His workmate, a faithful old sheep dog, has a pup who, one night, drives the whole flock off a cliff to their deaths. I think the story is old enough not to need a spoiler alert. The tragedy sets the plot in motion. We get an earthy glimpse of life and death consequences in shepherding. But we aren't in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, or David's Israel, from where we hear:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul."

This Psalm is one of the most beautifully faceted gems in all of scripture. For generations the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm has been memorised and recited, sought out for comfort and reassurance.

But many have trouble with this psalm today. The image of us as sheep is not flattering.

We might picture a Shepherd-Lord figure with cute clean lambs, like the Sunday School prints, but that was never honest. Sheep aren't very clean, they smell and do what they want. The Lord is my shepherd; but we can have trouble translating the ancient imagery into our time.

A "good shepherd" is more alien in Australia than he would have been in 1st century Israel. We like to romanticise shepherds as simple rural labourers. But rulers of the Ancient Near East were sometimes called shepherds. As a core economic business in those days, flocks could number in the tens of thousands. Shepherding required a considerable skill set. Travellers to the Middle East still see shepherds that are a bit rough in appearance and often rough with their sheep. The first modern shepherd I saw was swatting sheep on the rear end with his stick, yelling expletives. It's an earthy life-stained image, not the one on the serene pictures.

Then, the image of a Lord is not popular with many now either, let alone the picture of a Lord who seems to want to make people lie in the grass. But thankfully there are a number of images and we can find things that work for us. 'He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul.' I like the surf and running waters as a preference, but the idea of restoring our souls has some currency for us.

Our changed world means we need to think in new ways if we are to have a hope of benefiting from ancient texts and then of passing the benefit on to others.

We lived for some years in a seventy year old home that had some problems. The pressing need for renovation became clear very quickly! Sinking stumps, gaps opening, mould yes, that's the way it goes isn't it. As you get used to a place, as it ages or as the needs change, we need to restore and renovate.



## ***Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 21st, 2024***

### ***The Fig Tree Worship Resource***

I think if God were to use real estate vernacular to describe the collective state of our souls, the phrase would be something like, "souls with potential, in need of development, renovators delight!"

Psalms 23 tells us directly that God is in the business of soul restoration! We often need to be restored. For many, the soul is a forgotten and ill-treated part of our humanity that we largely ignore. Or perhaps we under-nourish our souls on a diet of randomly selected tidbits from the supermarket shelves of popular culture.

This gem of a psalm affirms the astonishing truth that God wants to restore our souls, restored to the glory they were intended to have. God wants to nourish us, wants to set a lavish table to feed us, so that our cup runs over. You, me and for everyone!

This inviting image tells a needy generation that there is food for the soul, that there is a God who wants to lead us all in ways that will restore our spirits even in the face of the darkest things our world can throw at us. New hope is coming, it says.

Even in the darkest valleys of hopelessness, fear or depression - the God of all goodness and mercy is with us, is our comfort and our strength. If our souls are presently a "renovators delight", then God is the one who delights to restore us!

God gives rest and refreshment for the soul beside renewing streams of living water, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation. "I am the good shepherd", says Jesus. We are known and loved by the one who gives his all for us.

Then, if the body of Christ is a shepherding body, perhaps we need to think, not so much of how we are being shepherded like sheep, but how we together are engaged in shepherding - nurturing, restoring and feeding?

It's God's grace that continues the ongoing work of restoring our souls - bringing us healing and wholeness, enabling us to be part of the shepherding work as well, to the delight of the restorer! Amen.

### ***Singing - Be still my soul TiS 123***

OR: Jesus the Lord said, I am the bread TiS 139

### ***Offering***

Good Shepherd, we bring these gifts, as we bring ourselves, to be blessed and used for the good of all. Open our eyes to see places and spaces of need, and open our hearts to participate in reaching out in love, for renewal and restoration.

### ***Notices***

April 22nd is Earth Day - "to demonstrate support for environmental protection. First held on April 22, 1970, it now includes a wide range of events coordinated globally by Earthday.org including 1 billion people in more than 193 countries. The official theme for 2024 is "Planet vs. Plastics". - Wikipedia

### ***Prayers for World & Community***

*Each petition is followed by a time of silence.*

Risen One, who shepherds and guides,  
hear us as we pray.

We open our hearts before you now,  
lifting the needs of the world  
and the communities around us.

We bring to mind places across the world  
where conflict is rife  
and natural disasters are prevalent . *(pause)*  
Good Shepherd who guides us,  
may your peace be known in these regions.

We bring to mind those whose lives



## ***Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 21st, 2024***

### ***The Fig Tree Worship Resource***

are affected by the weight of war, displacement  
and the ongoing effects of creation's groaning.  
(pause)

Good Shepherd who guides us,  
may your comfort come to them.

We bring to mind those in leadership  
and positions of power. (pause)  
Good Shepherd who guides us,  
may your wisdom and ways of love  
be evident in their decision making.

We bring to mind all who speak your name,  
proclaiming your love throughout the world.  
(pause)  
Good Shepherd who guides us,  
may their voices be heard and your love ignited.

We bring to mind all who are precious to us.  
(pause)  
Good Shepherd who guides us,  
may they know your love as we know your love.

In the name of the Risen Christ,  
we pray together then as he taught us:

### ***The Lord's Prayer***

---

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.

### ***Singing - Holy Spirit, go before us TiS 420***

---

OR: ***Company of stumblers***  
**Tune – AURELIA: (TiS 457)**

The church's one foundation  
is moving with the flock.  
The Christ, not held in structures,  
this boat, not moored in dock.  
The future seems uncertain,

the past, her vision wild,  
we break the bread together  
and feed her like your child.

When we come to the crossroads,  
not knowing what's ahead  
we weigh up all the outcomes,  
of where we might be led.  
We wait in anxious stillness  
amid the pending strife.  
Your Spirit whispers gently,  
'just choose the path of life'.

For we are all God's servants,  
we're pilgrims on the way,  
a company of stumblers  
made from a common clay.  
We'll seek the path of justice,  
the trail that leads to life,  
the road of loving-kindness,  
where all might know the Christ.

© Jennie Gordon 2023

### ***Blessing***

---

Go forth into the world,  
be strengthened by Christ  
who is our Cornerstone.

Walk in confidence,  
knowing the guiding hand  
of the Good Shepherd leading you.

Go in the joy of the Resurrected One,  
the ever expanding love of the Creator  
and may the Spirit be your constant companion  
on the journey. Amen.

Reflection: Rev. Ian Brown  
Wattlebird Ministry Team - Warragul

Liturgy: Rev. Amanda Nicholas  
Guest contributor - Friend of the Fig  
Tree

Editor: Rev. Jennie Gordon  
[revjenniegordon@gmail.com](mailto:revjenniegordon@gmail.com)

