

WEEK 3: SERVICE RESOURCES

THEME: JESUS THE SHEPHERD

MAIN READING: John 10.22-30

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

SECOND READING (if required) REVELATION 7.9-17

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

"Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore,

"they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 'Never again will they hunger never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

INVOCATION PRAYER

Loving Lord Jesus, some of us come to you worn out from the busyness and burdens of our days, yearning for the rest that only you can provide. Some of us come with doubts or a waning faith, seeking your refreshing touch. But no matter the state of our minds, hearts, or spirits, we come with gratitude, knowing that you welcome us with open arms. In your transformative love, you're renewing our souls, giving us fresh garments of hope and grace. We open ourselves to your work within and among us, lifting our spirits into the warmth of your holy presence, and raising our voices to celebrate your goodness. As you are present with us, O God, help us to be truly present with you. Guide us, lead us, and help us follow, so that we may both be blessed and become a blessing to others.

Amen

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Gracious God, We come before you in humility, recognizing our need for your cleansing touch. Just as Jesus knelt to wash the feet of his disciples, we acknowledge our need for your forgiveness and renewal. We have strayed from your path, and our hearts have been weighed down by the burdens of our actions.

Lord, we confess that we have not always loved as you have called us to love. We have failed to serve others with the same humility and grace that Jesus demonstrated. In our pride and self-centeredness, we have neglected to extend kindness and compassion to those around us.

Forgive us, O God, and wash away our sins. Renew our hearts and minds, so that we may follow in the footsteps of Jesus, our Servant King. Help us to embrace the calling to serve one another, to uplift the brokenhearted, and to bring hope to the weary.

As we come before you, we ask for your healing and restoration. Cleanse us from our iniquities, and fill us with the spirit of your love and grace. May we be instruments of your peace and agents of your mercy in this world.

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

INTERCESSIONS

Loving God, We give you thanks that we are never alone, for you are with us as our God, our Shepherd, and our Friend. With gratitude and hope, we pray for ourselves and our world...

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let our hearts align with your heart

Gracious God, You care for us deeply; we need nothing more. Hear the cries of those who hunger—for justice, dignity, freedom, love, and for the bread of both heaven and earth.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let our hearts align with your heart

Caring God, You lead us into havens of peace and rest. Hear the cries of those who are alone—those who grieve the loss of loved ones, those confined by illness, imprisonment, frailty, or confusion.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let our hearts align with your heart

Generous God, You breathe new life into us and guide us into new ways. We pray for the just and compassionate stewardship of your creation, for the fair sharing of its abundance, and for the ethical exploration of its wonders.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let our hearts align with your heart

Compassionate God, You are with me and comfort me, even when the darkness of the world looms large.

We pray for those who seek the truth; those who cannot speak, and those who cannot be heard, that the light of your Word may shine in the darkness which overshadows their lives.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let our hearts align with your heart

Merciful God, In the face of those who trouble me you provide for me, and pour out your blessings. Hear the cry of those trampled by racial or religious intolerance, Those disoriented by homelessness, and those defeated by unemployment;

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let our hearts align with your heart

As our Saviour Jesus taught us to pray, we say

Our Father...

DEPARTING PRAYER

For all that you have given to us - we thank you..

For all that you have revealed to us - we praise you.

For all that you have commanded - we pledge our obedience.

For all that you have called us to - we commit ourselves anew.

Amen

WEEK 3: HYMNS AND SONGS

- STF 6 Father, we love you
- STF 238 Lead us heavenly Father, lead us
- STF 248 I heard the voice of Jesus say
- STF 479 The King of love my Shepherd is
- STF 480 The Lord's my Shepherd (Crimmond)
- STF 481 The Lord's my Shepherd (Stuart Townend)
- STF 548 Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine
- STF 595 Lord, we have come at your own invitation
- STF 666 Master, speak! Thy servant heareth

Gracious God, you call your people

<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/gracious-god-you-call-your-people.pdf>

WEEK 3: REFLECTION

"My sheep hear my voice," Jesus says in today's gospel reading (John 10:22-30). "I know them, and they follow me."

I want that to be true—for me, for you, for all of us. I want to believe that we hear His voice and that we always follow Him.

But if I'm honest, I'm not always sure we do.

We live in an incredibly noisy world, don't we? A world filled with countless voices clamouring for our attention.

Advertisements, social media, news alerts, podcasts, and even well-meaning friends and family—it seems that everywhere we turn, someone is speaking.

And amidst all that noise, hearing the gentle, guiding voice of our Shepherd can feel like trying to catch a whisper in a hurricane.

Reflect on your past week. How many voices have you heard vying for your attention? Some of them are quite persuasive, aren't they? Companies spend millions crafting advertisements tailored specifically for us, convincing us that we need their products to be happier, healthier, more successful, or more accepted. Technology understands us better than ever, curating content designed to keep us scrolling, clicking, and buying.

Have you ever had that eerie moment when you talk about needing, say, a power washer, and the next time you open your social media, there it is—an ad for power washers? Our devices hear us. They know us. And often, we respond to their call more readily than we do the voice of our Shepherd.

However, those voices are false shepherds. They make promises they cannot keep. There is only one true Shepherd, and today, we are reminded to listen to His voice. For at the end of the day, there is only one voice that truly matters to our souls: the voice of Jesus Christ.

So, why do we not always hear His voice? And how might we hear it?

1. Jesus Isn't Saying What We Expect

One reason we miss Jesus' voice is that He doesn't say what we expect. In John 10, the Jewish leaders were right there, listening to Jesus. But they didn't really hear Him.

They expected the Messiah to be a military leader like King David, someone who would overthrow Rome and restore Israel's glory. Jesus didn't fit that mould. His message was different, and because it didn't align with their expectations, they missed it.

Isn't that true for us as well? We approach Jesus with our own expectations. We anticipate Him to affirm our opinions, bless our plans, or resolve our problems in particular ways. When He speaks differently—calling us to forgive instead of retaliating, to serve rather than be served, to trust in uncertainty—we might entirely miss His voice.

In today's world, we're quick to filter voices through our own biases. We listen for confirmation, not transformation. However, to hear Jesus, we must have an open heart. Let His words challenge us, change us, and lead us in unexpected ways.

2. We Feel Too Ashamed to Listen

Another reason we struggle to hear Jesus is shame. Our mistakes, failures, and sins weigh heavily upon us, convincing us that we are unworthy of His voice. It mirrors the reaction that Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden. After their sin, they hid from God, feeling ashamed and afraid (Genesis 3:8-10).

We do the same, don't we? We hide behind busy schedules, excuses, or even religious rituals, afraid to confront our brokenness. I've met people who avoid church because they feel they need to *"get their act together"* first. But that's not the gospel. Church isn't a hotel for saints; it's a hospital for sinners.

That is why many worship services commence with confession and forgiveness. We recognise our unworthiness, not to dwell in guilt but to embrace God's grace. Jesus does not wait for us to tidy ourselves up. He encounters us in our chaos, utters words of forgiveness, and rejuvenates our hearts. Only then can we genuinely hear His voice.

3. He's Saying Something We Don't Want to Hear

Sometimes, we don't hear Jesus because He's saying something we don't want to hear.

Consider Jonah. God commanded him to go to Nineveh, but Jonah was reluctant. Consequently, he fled in the opposite direction.

Likewise, there was the rich young ruler who approached Jesus to inquire about inheriting eternal life. Jesus instructed him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. The man departed sorrowfully because he had vast wealth (Mark 10:17-22).

We're no different. We love hearing Jesus say, *"Come to me, all who are weary,"* but we hesitate when He says, *"Take up your cross and follow me."* His call often challenges our comfort zones, priorities, and desires, requiring surrender.

But here's the remarkable part: even when we resist, Jesus continues to call. At times, He employs life's hardships to capture our attention.

C.S. Lewis wrote, *"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."*

Like a persistent shepherd, Jesus seeks out His lost sheep. Regardless of how far we wander, His voice summons us back, offering grace, purpose, and peace.

Recognising the Shepherd's Voice

In John 10, Jesus does not refer to us as "followers" or "disciples"; rather, he describes us as "sheep." While this may not seem like a compliment, it serves as a profound image.

In Jesus' time, shepherds often gathered at communal watering holes, their flocks mingling. Imagine the noise—hundreds of sheep, shepherds chatting, a chaotic scene. But when it was time to leave, each shepherd simply called, and their sheep followed.

Why? Because the sheep recognised their shepherd's voice.

Despite the noise, they knew who to follow.

That's what Jesus invites us into—a relationship so personal, so intimate, that we recognise His voice even amidst life's chaos. It's not about perfect listening but about familiarity. The more time we spend with Jesus—in Scripture, in prayer, in worship—the more attuned we become to His voice.

The Voice That Leads Us Home

At the end of the day, many voices will vie for our attention. However, only one voice leads us home. Jesus states, *"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish."*

Regardless of how noisy life becomes, and regardless of how often we miss His call, His voice endures. Steady. Faithful. Loving.

May we learn to quieten our hearts, attune our ears, and follow the voice of our true Shepherd.

For His is the voice that guides us to peace, purpose, and, ultimately, home.

Loving Father, amidst the noise and chaos of our hectic lives, help us to hear Your gentle voice calling us by name. Calm the distractions, ease our restless hearts, and attune our ears to Your words of truth, love, and grace.

When we expect You to speak in certain ways, remind us to listen with open hearts, ready to receive whatever You have to say. When shame and guilt make us feel unworthy, cover us with Your mercy and remind us that Your love never fails. When Your words challenge us to step beyond our comfort zones, give us the courage to follow wherever You lead.

Teach us to discern Your voice above all others. Guide us, lead us, and draw us ever closer to You. For we are Your sheep, and You are our Shepherd. In Your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Sermons in Art #3



Francisco de Zurbarán, Lamb of God

It is the first time we see Jesus in the Gospel of John.

The Baptist gazes across the barren desert landscape, the cool waters of the Jordan in the distance, and spots the distant figure of Jesus.

Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29)

John could have referred to Jesus by many titles. Prince of Peace, Son of Man, Messiah—but he specifically chose the title, Lamb of God. Then, as if to underline the message, he repeated the title the next day.

The next day, John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, Look, the Lamb of God! (John 1.35-36)

Painted somewhere between 1635 and 1640, this stark and startling oil canvas captures the essence of the devotional message contained within the phrase Lamb of God.

Spanish artist, Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664) eschews the typically overblown compositions of the Renaissance era, which packed every scene with gawking onlookers, household clutter, meekly watching animals and all manner of trinkets.

Here we have the simple—but brilliantly rendered—portrait of a bound lamb on a plain dark grey slab. There are no background elements as if to focus the whole of our attention upon the lamb.

Indeed, it appears the artist deliberately mimics the striking *chiaroscuro* style of Italian master Caravaggio. We derive the term *chiaroscuro* from an Italian word which means "light and dark".

It's a technique that uses contrasting light and dark tones to create the illusion of depth and volume. Caravaggio pioneered the technique, and Baroque artists, such as Rembrandt and Rubens, also used it.

We can assume Zurbaran derived deep spiritual meaning from this imagery, as he painted five versions of this scene within the 1630s, presumably for private patrons.

This version, housed in the Prado in Madrid, is the pinnacle.

Our singular subject is a live merino lamb, tied and bound in a sacrificial position; its legs thrust into the foreground and tied into a crucifix position. It appears resigned to its fate, its sad eyes gazing off to the left.

There is no blood shown in the painting; we are to understand that the lamb is alive, but that its destiny is sealed. It is pure, spotless, and blemish-free.

The light source is a way off to the upper left—and the animal barely throws a shadow. Beyond the lamb, all is darkness, and this forces our full attention upon the animal.

Behold the Lamb of God.

Our impulse, naturally, is to untie him. Perhaps that is why the knot is out of sight so that we will not detain ourselves even considering that option?

Is there anything I can do for him? The lamb is in trouble. But I cannot save him.

Maybe there is something he can do for me?

Here we approach the deeper meaning of this painting. John's words about the Lamb of God are no random comment. They have deep roots in the Old Testament and the Jewish culture of the day.

There are almost 200 mentions of lambs in the Old Testament. Some refer to their important place within the agrarian culture of the day—valued for food, milk, wool and trading.

There are many more references to lambs in the worship life of the Israelites, where they would be sacrificed as part of the cultic life of the people as it evolved from the earliest times (Genesis 4.4) through to the time of Jesus.

Chief amongst those is the Passover Lamb first spoken about in the book of Exodus, where the sacrifice of a lamb and subsequent rituals provided a temporary means of dealing with the brokenness and sin within the community.

We can assume from John's references to the Passover in the second chapter of his Gospel that the time of the Passover approached when he first eyeballed Jesus near the Jordan.

It's possible that he had the approaching Passover in mind when he speak. You will soon eat the Passover meal—but here is the one who will fulfil and complete this ceremonial meal. Get ready for a fresh start. The old is ending, the new has come.

A few years later, Paul wrote this to the Corinthians:

Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you are. For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5.7)

There will be commentators who wish to focus on what might happen to the lamb. The shedding of blood, the sacrifice wrought as the life force slips from this innocent lamb.

But Zurbaran did not create a painting called The Lamb slain—but The lamb bound

No matter how much we want to leap ahead—to speak of atonement and blood sacrifices, the fact remains that this lamb is alive still, yet bound.

Perhaps we might think differently?

Perhaps salvation begins with a living encounter with this helpless lamb?

Bound and headed for death, this frail lamb offers a clue to the means of redemption.

It is a stark reminder—badly needed today—that guns and bullets, and power and force do not save us. But rather, redemption comes through weakness, humility, and service.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Zurbaran offers an invitation, not only to behold but to encounter. To embrace the One who comes—as a helpless bound lamb, not long for this world.

Jesus entered his world for you and me to give himself for many. It is already accomplished, already done. It is finished.

All that is required is to behold this lamb, to come to him, and to take him as our Saviour.

WEEK 3: SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Life moves quickly, often pulling our attention in a hundred different directions.

We can easily become lost in schedules, responsibilities, and distractions, sometimes forgetting to pause and recognise God's presence.

But what if we carried a single verse of Scripture with us throughout the day, allowing it to shape our thoughts and actions?

This is the essence of the Daily Examen—a simple yet powerful practice of meditating on God's Word moment by moment.

What is the Daily Examen?

The Daily Examen is a spiritual practice rooted in reflection and awareness.

Traditionally, it involves reviewing your day with gratitude, recognising where God was present, and seeking His guidance for the future.

In this adaptation, we incorporate a short verse of Scripture, using it as an anchor to keep us mindful of God's presence throughout the day.

Instead of waiting for a quiet moment to focus on God, the Daily Examen invites us to carry Scripture into the everyday—our work, conversations, and even mundane tasks—allowing it to shape our perspective and responses.

How to Practice the Daily Examen with Scripture

1. Choose a Verse for the Day

Each morning, choose a short Scripture verse that resonates with you.

It might be a promise, a reminder of God's love, or encouragement for your current season of life.

Some examples include:

"Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)

"God is our refuge. We will not fear, though the earth give way. The nations rage, kingdoms fall. "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46)

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1)

Write it down or save it on your phone so you can return to it throughout the day.

2. Reflect on the Verse in the Morning

Before diving into your daily routine, reflect on your chosen verse for a few moments. Ask yourself:

- What does this verse reveal about God's character?
- How does it apply to my life today?
- How can I live out this truth in my thoughts, words, and actions?

3. Let the Verse Guide Your Thoughts and Actions

As you go about your day, return to your chosen verse whenever possible: While commuting, repeat the verse in your mind and let it bring a sense of peace.

Let the verse remind you to respond with patience and grace in a difficult conversation.

During a stressful moment, let the words of Scripture ground you in trust and faith.

In moments of stillness, whisper the verse as a prayer of gratitude or surrender.

4. End the Day with Reflection

Before going to bed, take a few minutes to review your day through the lens of your chosen Scripture.

Ask yourself:

- How did this verse shape my mindset and actions today?
- Where did I notice God's presence?
- How might I carry this lesson forward into tomorrow?

Express gratitude for the ways God was present, and if you struggled to stay mindful of the verse, offer grace to yourself and ask for renewed focus.

The Power of a Simple Verse

One verse, carried with intention, can transform how we experience our day. It keeps our thoughts in truth, helps us recognise God's presence in the ordinary, and shapes our actions with greater love and wisdom.

Over time, this practice deepens our connection with God, making Him not just a part of our quiet time but a constant companion in our daily lives.

So today, choose a verse. Let it be your anchor. And as you move through the moments of your day, let God's Word guide you, shape you, and draw you closer to Him.

WEEK 3: WRITING PROMPTS

1. "Discerning the Shepherd's Voice in a Noisy World"

In a world filled with constant distractions and competing voices, how can we better recognise and follow the voice of Jesus? Write about practical ways to tune in to His guidance amidst the chaos of everyday life.

2. "The Power of Grace: Overcoming Shame and Hearing God's Call"

Consider how shame can prevent us from hearing God's voice. How does the gospel message of grace help us overcome feelings of unworthiness and open our hearts to God's love and guidance?

3. **"When Jesus Calls Us to More: Embracing the Challenges of His Voice"**
Sometimes, Jesus calls us to things we don't want to hear, like sacrifice or change. How can we respond to these challenging calls with faith and courage, trusting that His voice leads us to our true purpose?

4. **"The Shepherd's Voice Leads Us Home: Finding Peace in His Guidance"**
Write about how Jesus' voice offers us peace and direction, especially during times of uncertainty. How does the assurance that He will never leave us guide us toward rest and trust in His plans for our lives?

WEEK 3: SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

Here are some engaging Bible study questions on John 10:22-30, focusing on the theme of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Use as many or as few as you find suitable in your group setting.

1. In verse 24, the Jews ask Jesus to tell them plainly if He is the Messiah. Why do you think they struggled to believe in Jesus despite His miracles and teachings?
2. In verses 25-26, Jesus explains that His works testify to His identity, but some people still do not believe. What might be some reasons people struggle to believe in Jesus even today?
3. Jesus describes His followers as sheep who listen to His voice in verse 27. What does it mean to "hear" Jesus' voice in our daily lives, and how can we cultivate a deeper listening relationship with Him?
4. In verse 28, Jesus promises eternal life to His followers and assures them that no one can snatch them out of His hand. How does this promise impact your faith and sense of security in your relationship with Jesus?
5. Jesus states in verse 29 that His Father, who has given Him the sheep, is greater than all. How does understanding God's greatness and sovereignty influence your view of life's challenges and uncertainties?
6. In verse 30, Jesus declares, "I and the Father are one." What implications does this statement have for our understanding of Jesus' identity and His relationship with God the Father?
7. How do the themes of shepherding, protection, and care in this passage resonate with other biblical references to God as a shepherd (e.g., Psalm 23)? What new insights do you gain from comparing these passages?
8. Reflecting on the entire passage, how do Jesus' words and actions challenge or affirm your current understanding of His role as the Good Shepherd?
9. In what practical ways can we as a small group support each other in "listening" to Jesus' voice and following His guidance as our Shepherd?