



# Kaurihohore Historic Church

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## Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish Sunday 21 April 2024 – Easter 4

The service this morning is led by Mike Nielsen,  
one of our Lay Preachers

### **Welcome to our service this morning.**

In working together on our shared mission, we commit to seven core values:

***Togetherness, Humility, Curiosity, Love, Inclusiveness, Justice, Sustainability.***

**Love:** we are committed to a selfless love to all, including those marginalised by society and the wider church.

Mission Statement: Sharing God's love, creating hope, working for justice.

## Welcome

### Call to worship:

Come worship God, glorious creator.

**We will praise God for the gifts of the towering mountains and fast running waters, the soaring eagles and the busy bees.**

Come worship God, eternally compassionate one.

**We will thank God, with us in the times of challenge and greatest need.**

Come worship God, who anointed Jesus.

**We will glorify God for the selfless life, the cross- death, and the risen presence of Jesus. Come worship God.**

*Source: Responsive Prayers Year B (David Sparks)*

### Opening prayer:

Loving God, you have given us your chosen one, Jesus.

**Through his life you show us the Way.**

Jesus the teacher tells us to love generously.

**We learn from him.**

Jesus the healer reminds us to care with our whole heart.

**We follow his example.**

Jesus the justice-bringer reminds us to be attentive to wrongdoing.

**We stay justice-centred and strong.**

Jesus the founder of the disciple community encourages us to work for the common good.

**We share the challenge.**

You are people of the Way.

**Loving God, we will follow Jesus. Amen.**

*Source: Responsive Prayers Year B (David Sparks)*

**Scripture reading:** Psalm 23

## Hymn: Great Is Your Faithfulness (HFTC 260)

1. Great is your faithfulness,  
O God my Father,  
you have fulfilled all your  
promise to me;  
you never fail and your love  
is unchanging –  
all you have been you for  
ever will be.

2. Summer and winter, and  
springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon and stars in their  
courses above  
join with all nature in  
eloquent witness  
to your great faithfulness,  
mercy and love.

### *Chorus:*

Great is your faithfulness,  
great is your faithfulness,  
morning by morning new mercies  
I see;  
all I have needed your hand has  
provided –  
great is your faithfulness, Father,  
to me.

3. Pardon for sin, and a  
peace everlasting,  
your living presence to  
cheer and to guide;  
strength for today, and bright  
hope for tomorrow –  
these are the blessings  
your love will provide.

## **Prayer of confession**

Forgive us, O God, for the times when we fail to reach out and accompany those who are going through difficult times; those who feel imprisoned in a valley of shadows and find themselves overwhelmed by life.

Jesus, good shepherd,

**help us to take the time and make the space to hear your call to us.**

The call to reveal your love, compassion and comfort wherever you need us to bind up the wounds of the victims of today's society.

Jesus, good shepherd,

**help us to take the time and make the space to hear your call to us.**

The call to reveal in tangible and authentic ways, your passion for those who feel powerless to make any changes for good in their lives.

Jesus, good shepherd,

**help us to take the time and make the space to hear your call to us**

The call to empty ourselves of all that is contrary to your life within us so that

your goodness and mercies are enjoyed not as rewards to be hoarded but as gifts to be shared. In your name, we pray. **Amen**

*Source: Moira Laidlaw*

## **Words of assurance**

O God, bring new life, where we are worn and tired;  
new love, where we have turned hard hearted;  
forgiveness, where we have wounded,  
and the joy and freedom of your holy spirit,  
where we are the prisoners of our selves

*Source: Rex A E Hunt*

## **[Hymn: O Love That Will Not Let Me Go \(HFTC 486\)](#)**

1. O Love, that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in Thee;  
I give you back the life I owe,  
That in your ocean depths  
its flow  
May richer, fuller be.
2. O Light that follows all  
my way,  
Renew your radiance in me:  
I welcome your life-giving ray  
That in your sunshine's  
blaze each day  
May brighter, fairer be.
3. O Joy, that seeks for me through  
pain,  
Restore your hopefulness to me;  
I trace the rainbow through the  
rain,  
And trust your promise once  
again:  
That dawn shall tearless be.
4. O Cross, that raises up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there  
blossoms red,  
Life that shall endless be.

**Scripture reading:** 1 John 3:16-24

**Gospel reading:** John 10:11-18

## **Reflection**

Today is sometimes known as Good Shepherd Sunday. The fourth Sunday of every Easter season in the three year lectionary is always focused on Psalm 23 paired with stories from the New Testament about Jesus as shepherd.

Jesus as shepherd is imagery that is scattered throughout the New Testament, all the way through to Revelation. Today, Psalm 23 is paired with the gospel of John, where Jesus says I am the good shepherd.

So this is familiar territory. Psalm 23 features here every single year. And not without reason, it is possibly the most famous and beloved psalm, maybe even the most famous and beloved passage from the entire Bible. Psalm 23 is a psalm of lament, it is written by someone clearly in the midst of a crisis, but it is also a psalm of trust, which provides comfort and hope to many.

I admit that when I saw Psalm 23 on the lectionary readings for today, I was initially a bit complacent: I know this Psalm and what it's saying, right? As Rory read this morning:

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.

Then as I was preparing for the service, I came across Robert Alter's translation of Psalm 23, and it led me to another perspective of the psalm that I really wanted to share with you today.

Robert Alter is a scholar of both Hebrew and comparative literature. A few years ago, he released a translation of the entirety of the Hebrew scriptures (or often more commonly referred to as the Old Testament) which was the culmination of 20 years work and is considered unique as it's an entire translation by only one person. The Hebrew scriptures are full of poetic rhythm and metaphors that Alter argues are often distorted in other translations.

So his translation of the scriptures can look different in places to what we are familiar with.

Here's his translation of Psalm 23 – listen for the differences compared to the version from the NRSV that Rory read to us earlier today:

The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.  
In grass meadows He makes me lie down,  
by quiet waters guides me.  
My life He brings back.  
He leads me on pathways of justice  
for His name's sake.  
Though I walk in the vale of death's shadow,  
I fear no harm,  
for You are with me.  
Your rod and Your staff—  
it is they that console me.  
You set out a table before me  
in the face of my foes.  
You moisten my head with oil,  
my cup overflows.  
Let but goodness and kindness pursue me  
all the days of my life.  
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
for many long days.

There are a few interesting changes in Alter's translation that stand out, for instance, 'he restores my soul' becomes 'my life he brings back', and 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long' becomes 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for many long days'.

But the part I wanted to focus in on today is his translation of what is commonly 'He leads me in right paths for his name's sake'. Here Robert Alter translate the Hebrew as 'He leads me on pathways of justice for His name's sake'.

Right paths, or sometimes, pathways of righteousness, is often presented to us as meaning God guides us when we are lost, he leads us on life's journey, or even that he helps us make good moral choices. Now none of that is untrue, but Alter's translation sheds more light on what the author of the psalm perhaps meant in this context.

He leads me on pathways of justice for his name's sake...

Justice becomes what theologian and historian Diana Butler Bass terms, the pivotal word in this psalm. The beginning of the psalm builds towards pathways of justice:

The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.  
In grass meadows He makes me lie down,  
by quiet waters guides me.  
My life He brings back.  
He leads me on pathways of justice  
for His name's sake.

This translation takes Psalm 23 out of familiar territory and shifts it into a psalm with justice at its core. It becomes a political psalm, which can be easy to miss for those of us living in New Zealand or other parts of the western world, particularly those of us living in relative comfort.

Philip Jenkins, a history professor focused on global Christianity, illustrates this in an article where he invites westerners to a common interpretation of Psalm 23 found in churches across the Global South.

He writes:

Read Psalm 23 as a political tract, a rejection of unjust secular authority. For Africans and Asians, the psalm offers a stark rebuttal to claims by unjust states that they care lovingly for their subjects — while they exalt themselves to the heavens. Christians reply simply, “The Lord is my shepherd — you aren’t!” Adding to the power of the psalm, the evils that it condemns are at once political and spiritual, forces of tyranny and of the devil.

This really turns Psalm 23 on its head for me. God is leading us on pathways of justice. This takes Psalm 23 from what I thought was a comforting, restful psalm, to a psalm with justice at its core, and with a clear direction from God about our role in bring about justice.

Diana Butler Bass says that when read through this lens, Psalm 23 is transformed into a protest anthem. She writes:

It still comforts, yes. It reminds those abused, on the margins, forgotten, and poor that they are, indeed, citizens of a more just realm: Blessed are the poor; blessed are those who mourn; blessed are the hungry; blessed are the persecuted. The Lord of generosity and justice is with us.

But it also calls God’s people to stay on the pathway of justice, assuring us that injustice, oppression, and death can and will be overcome.

So what does it look like to stay on the pathway of justice?

I think our reading from the first letter of John this morning can act as a guide. In that passage, the author talks about love, and Jesus’ commandment to love each other. In verse 18, the author says: Little children, let’s not love with words or speech but with action and truth.

A pathway of justice is one paved with love, and not just a passive love, but love in action.



Earlier this month one of my favourite theologians, Jeff Chu, became ordained by the Reformed Church in America. This was a long 8 year process for him, complicated unfortunately because he is gay. But he persevered and it was so exciting to view his ordination ceremony. As I was listening to his ordination sermon a part of it resonated with me in terms of how it links with this idea of love in action. He said:

The good news of the Gospel is that, though this world and this life might leave us wounded and scarred, God doesn't abandon us in that pain. The good news of the Gospel is that, though we might feel battered and beaten down, God has not left us without hope. The good news of the Gospel is that, though suffering is real and powerful, love is even more so—and God's love transcends and conquers even death.

But this good news must be embodied. It is not truly a worthy notion or a noble concept until it is embodied. It is not an enfleshed reality until it is embodied. It is not life-giving or death-rebuking until it is embodied. It does not bring strength and comfort, solace and encouragement, justice and healing until it takes on hands and feet, muscle and sinew, movement and action. It does not become material until it walks into the room and shifts the air and says, "I'm here."

This is such a great description of love in action. To travel the pathway of justice, we must embody the good news, we must move beyond just words.

One final quote, this time from AJ Hendry, who I've talked about before as one of Aotearoa's joyful revolutionaries, out there fighting for justice for some of our country's most vulnerable. I was extremely challenged when reading his newsletter this week. He says:

Something I have noticed increasingly in my advocacy and my work, is that, people - Christian or otherwise - love charity. They are comfortable throwing a few coins to the poor kid on the street, or helping that overwhelmed and undersupported young mum clean her house once a year, or dropping a tin of food into the food

box for the struggling family over the holiday season. New Zealanders do a lot of this stuff, and Christians probably more so than others.

But all this, the food boxes, the working bee's, the \$1 donation to the starving child, it all has its place, but it is Charity not Justice.

And for you and I, if we identify as followers of Jesus, we are not called to Charity. We are required to seek Justice.

The thing with Charity, is that if we are honest with ourselves, it is but a tool of the Empire. Charity comforts the conscious of the comfortable. It soothes the unsettled mind of the powerful. It provides a mask for the eyes of the privileged.

But, Justice, well Justice is something different. Justice is about making the wrong right. Justice requires us to take responsibility for our part in this messed up and corrupt world we live in, Justice prompts us to ask the question why. Why are children living in motels alone around our country? Why are our elders on the street? Why do we accept that some people can amass hoards of wealth, while others starve and struggle? Why?

Justice asks these questions, and then requires an answer.

Justice moves us from "helping those poor people" over there, into solidarity, into the struggle, into recognizing that those people, are my people, are my brothers, are my sisters, are my neighbour's, and that their struggle is my own.

As our readings from Psalm 23 and the Gospel of John today say, we have a God who is a good shepherd, we follow a king, Jesus, who is good shepherd. And our response to that is to follow Jesus on the pathway of justice, a pathway paved with love. This isn't an easy pathway to travel on, it'll likely push us out of our comfort zone, however it is one that we must travel on, knowing that we have Jesus, the good shepherd, there traveling the road alongside us.

Let us pray.

## Prayer

Good Shepherd,  
Teach us to follow you  
to care for all that are close to us,  
to protect those who are threatened,  
to welcome those who are rejected,  
to forgive those who are burdened by guilt,  
to heal those who are broken and sick,  
to share with those who have little or nothing,  
to take the time to really know one another  
and love as you have loved us.

Good Shepherd,  
Teach us to follow you  
to spread compassion to those who are far away,  
to speak for those who are voiceless,  
to defend those who are oppressed and abused,  
to work for justice for those who are exploited,  
to make peace for those who suffer violence,  
to take the time to recognise our connectedness,  
and to love as you have loved us.

Good Shepherd,  
Teach us to follow you  
and to be faithful to calling you gave us  
to be shepherds in your name.

*Source: John van de Laar (Sacredise)*

## **Hymn: On the Path of Justice (Richard Bruxvoort Colligan)**

1. Green pastures, quiet waters  
Lead us and restore us  
Death-shadow, fearful valley  
Lead us and restore us

*Refrain:*  
On the path of justice Oh-oh  
On the path of justice  
Oh lead us on the path of justice

2. Old hatreds reconciling  
Bring us to your table  
Full blessing overflowing  
Bring us to your table

3. Full lifetimes in your presence  
Your compassion drives us  
Full lifetimes in your presence  
Your compassion drives us

## Offering prayer

Your voice, O God, is calling us to action:

**to speak out for the needy,  
to affirm the seekers,  
to comfort the distressed,  
to encourage the downhearted,  
to challenge the complacent.**

These gifts enable your voice to be heard; bless them!

**Amen**

*Source: Prayers to Share Year A (David Sparks)*

## Prayers of intercession

We pray for those whose lives and rights are sacrificed in the name of power and greed.

We pray for those who risk themselves by accompanying others along paths of deep suffering, through valleys of fear and despair.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who work to feed and shelter and educate the poor peoples of our world.

We pray for those skilled at nursing and healing, and those who are suffering or ill in body, mind or spirit.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who care for the victims of our society, those unable to cope with life, the neglected, the abused.

We pray for peoples and places of concern in our world this day  
*(a silence is kept)*

We pray for those we know, relatives or friends who are facing difficult times

*(a silence is kept)*

We pray for ourselves that we might follow the example of the Good Shepherd and follow his way of love. We make all our prayers in Christ's name. **Amen.**

**Hymn: Dare to live the dream God gives you (David Bjorlin; [tune: Hyfrydol](#))**

1. Dare to live the dream God  
gives you,  
Seek out paths as yet unknown,  
For the Spirit leads you onward,  
And you never walk alone.

*Refrain:*

Go in courage, walking humbly,  
Bearing love none can destroy.  
Doing justice, loving mercy,  
Go with God, and go in joy.

2. When the dread of doubt  
assails you,  
And the road remains unclear,  
Yet our faithful God will guide you  
Through the doubt and dread  
of fear.

3. Journey on with true companions,  
Joining hands and sharing bread,  
For we share a common journey  
And in friendship we are fed.

4. Dare to live the dream God  
gives us,  
Brave the path, and face  
the fear,  
For the Spirit will unite us;  
Christ himself is always near

## **Commissioning**

Go from here as good shepherds.

**We will be there for the downtrodden.**

**We will be there for the exploited.**

**We will be there for the despairing.**

**We will be there for the depressed.**

**We will be there for the anxious.**

**We will be there for the careworn.**

**We will be there for those who have been treated unjustly.**

**We will be there for those who need a second chance.**

God, the Good Shepherd, will go with you.

*Source: Responsive Prayers Year A (David Sparks)*

**Closing karakia:**

Kia tau ki a tātou katoa

Te atawhai o tō tātou Ariki, a Ihu  
Karaiti

Me te aroha o te Atua

Me te whiwhingatahitanga

Ki te wairua tapu

Ake, ake, ake

Amine

*Translation*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus  
Christ,*

*and the love of God,*

*and the fellowship of the Holy  
Spirit be with you all*

*Forever and ever*

*Amen*