

Lectionary readings: Acts 2: 42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2: 19-25; John 10: 1-10

For reflection and prayer

- **Acts 2:** Here we have the characteristics of the early church: commitment to growing in their faith, prayerfulness, a sense of awe and wonder at what God was doing in their midst, wonderful harmony, deep sharing, worship together, joyful celebration, an attractiveness that drew people to them, rapid church growth. How does this challenge us as a church? Which areas do we need to work at?
- **Psalm 23:** How often Psalm 23 crops up in the lectionary. This must be the best known and best loved psalm. Let's read it as if for the first time and let God touch us afresh. *'The Lord is my constant companion. There is no need that He cannot fulfil. Whether His course for me points to the mountaintops of glorious joy or to the valleys of human suffering, He is by my side. He is ever present with me. He is close beside me when I tread the dark streets of danger, and even when I flirt with death itself, He will not leave me. When the pain is severe, He is near to comfort. When the burden is heavy, He is there to lean upon. When depression darkens my soul, He touches me with eternal joy. When I feel empty and alone, He fills the aching vacuum with His power. My security is in His promise to be near me always and in the knowledge that He will never let me go.'* (Psalms Now)
- **1 Peter 2:** It's so easy for us to start moaning and complaining when the going gets tough. But we need to

remember Jesus, how He suffered in silence, committing everything to God, allowing God to bring good out of evil. So, when people rub us up the wrong way, or behave in a way we don't like, why not, like Jesus, respond with grace and compassion and understanding, thus allowing God into the situation to transform it? So often the ego comes to the fore, giving rise to bitterness, resentment, harsh criticism, which sows seeds of destruction. God's way of unconditional love and sacrificial giving of ourselves, like Jesus, brings about a transformation of the church, the Body of Christ. Are we prepared to take that risk?

- **John 10:** The gate is what this parable is about. It is an open gate with the sheep and the shepherd having freedom to come and go at will. It's easy for us to confine ourselves to the church. It's safe to meet together each week for worship; we feel secure; it doesn't involve risk. But Jesus did not come to bring us security, safety and a life free from risk. He came to bring us abundant life, life in all its fullness. If we confine our Christianity to church, we will remain safe, but we will not have fullness of life. If we follow Jesus through the open gate, He will lead us to places where we are vulnerable, but we will have experiences which are life-giving and enable us to grow. Are we willing to let go of our security, like Jesus, and be free to be and do what we were created for? Jesus is the One who can lead us to enter into the fullness of our humanity, but it does mean leaving the safety of the 'sheepfold' and venturing out to face ridicule and opposition, confusion and uncertainty, and yet respond in the way that Jesus, our Shepherd, did, with a freedom that comes from His presence with us, secure in the knowledge that we are safe with Him.