

**NORTH BALWYN UNITING CHURCH
SUNDAY 29 APRIL 2012, EASTER 4
GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY
BAPTISM**

Rev'd Anneke Oppewal

Introduction to psalm 23:

For me, putting emphasis in turn on each word of the first line of the psalm has for a long time been a way for me to get back to basics where faith is concerned:



The Lord - These words indicate who I am to pay allegiance to in my life. Lord of my life is God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, Crucified, Resurrected, source of life and light, brother. I don't need to accept anybody else to "lord it over me", there is no other authority I have to adhere to.

is - this is a truth for now, inescapable, whatever future doubts I may have, for now this is, should be, the ultimate truth for me in my life.

my - not someone else's, this is *my* shepherd. I need to own him.

shepherd - There is a whole raft of images that come with that word. As someone who grew up in the country they are images I have been familiar with from childhood. A shepherd is someone with a rod or staff, who knows dog, care, carrying.

I - not think about anybody else for the moment, or the wider Church. This is for me, something to commit to personally.

will - Speaks of trust for the future, but also of dedication and commitment to make that future happen as far as I can myself help to be part of it taking shape.

not - does not mean life will be easy.

want - go wanting. I trust that, when all is said and done, nothing essential will be lacking in my life. That in the end I will be provided for with whatever it is I need for my journey. Even if that journey should take me through the most difficult and painful of circumstances.

We read:

Psalm 23, Uniting in Worship page 260

THE BOWL

When reflecting on the readings for this Sunday suddenly a bowl I made a couple of years ago came to mind. A paper mache bowl. I wonder if any of

you children have ever done paper mache? Perhaps you have. Basically what you do is glue together pieces of paper to make a whole. It may be a doll you make, or a face, or it may be a bowl, like I did.

When we read the 23rd psalm the image is one of abundance, of a cup running over, of a bowl holding everything good that life has to give. It is about safety and places of peace, of guidance as to where to go and how to live, it is about protection, even where death is near, it is about good food, tasty wine and a 5 star spa treatment from the Lord.

I think that's where the image of the bowl connects to the readings. The image of a bowl filled with all the good things of life, all the things we need to make life positive and full of the riches of God's giving. Filled to the brim and ready to be tipped over into our lives to feed us, nourish us and refresh us with its flow.

Dorothy Golding made a paper mache bowl in the shape of the baptismal font for this morning. A bowl the children are going to decorate at the back of the Church during the sermon into a very special bowl for the Church.

That was one connection.

The other I made through the other reading: a passage from Acts 2.

Acts 2: 42-47

REFLECTION: "A community of Saints"

The reading from Acts paints a picture of the Church just after the Holy Spirit came down. It is a frighteningly perfect picture. All who believed were together it says, they shared everything, they spend much time together in the temple and at home they break bread together and eat their food with glad and generous hearts praising God and having the goodwill of all.

Wow!

It is a dream of a Church, full of the goodness that we would all want the Church to possess. A place running over with good, constructive, active and fruitful faith.

Awesome!

They are what Psalm 23 sings about: a place where people find healing, refreshment, care and direction and where the goodness and mercy of God flow out into the world.

A cup running over! To represent that cup I asked Dorothy Golding to make a lovely paper mache bowl for this morning the size and shape of our baptismal font. And I asked Kathryn Taylor to print all the names of the members of our

congregation. That list is being torn up by the children into little bits and pieces to be paper macheed onto the plain, font-sized bowl Dorothy made. What we will end up with is a bowl with all the names of those who want to be part of this community, this congregation, going onto it. Isn't that an exciting idea? All of us, worked into a big bowl, about the size of the baptismal font.

You see, if we talk about the good Shepherd, the green pastures, the still waters, if we talk about being guided along the right pathways and being comforted when in the valley of death, if we talk real nourishment about 5 star spiritual spa treatment when we need it, this Church, this community is a place, a bowl, called to be running over with all of that, just like Luke reports those first Christians were doing two thousand years ago.

All of us, each in our own way, called to be part of that cup, that holding and loving from which the healing and helping power of God can be poured out into the world. A cup to come to when we need to be nourished and refreshed and cared for ourselves. A place to gather around and celebrate the abundance of God's grace. Amen.