

Sermon 4th Easter Sunday The Good Shepherd Jn 10:11-18, Acts 4:5-12, I Jn 3:16-24 26th April

Objective: In what way can we hear Jesus' voice and follow Him?

The priest burst into the classroom and signalled to the teacher that he would be able to do the good shepherd story time after all. He told the children about sheep, that they weren't smart and needed lots of guidance, and that a shepherd's job was to stay close to the sheep, protect them from wild animals and keep them from wandering off and doing dumb things that would get them hurt or killed. He pointed to the little children in the room and said that they were the sheep and needed lots of guidance. Then the minister put his hands out to the side, palms up in a dramatic gesture, and with raised eyebrows said to the children, "If you are the sheep then who is the shepherd?" - obviously indicating himself. A silence of a few seconds followed. Then a young visitor said, "Jesus, Jesus is the shepherd." The young priest, obviously caught by surprise, said to the boy, "Well, then, who am I?" The little boy frowned thoughtfully and then said with a shrug, "I guess you must be a sheep dog."

Only Jesus himself could set himself up as the Good Shepherd who owned the sheep and who knows His sheep perfectly and they trust Him. The priest in the story had been too assumptive of his level of authority and the young lad had put him in his place. But what does this story of the Good shepherd tell us about the role of Jesus in our lives?

Background: In parts of the Middle East the sheep still follow the shepherd around and respond to the voice of a single shepherd who is with them. This shepherd alone is trusted by the sheep. At night they are easily called into the sheepfold and the shepherd lies across the door to protect the fold. Jesus says I am the Good Shepherd I am the gate of the Sheepfold.

This is the basis for understanding the parable of the Good Shepherd. **Jesus is the person whose voice we recognise** and although He works through others Jesus is the Shepherd we look up to and in whom we put our ultimate trust. It is also **Jesus who was prepared to lay down His life for us**. This was the role of the one who lay across the entrance.

In the parable of the Good Shepherd there is a difference between the shepherd who owns and loves the sheep and the **hired shepherd** who clearly does not have that same duty of care as a priority. As a hired shepherd they are primarily interested in doing enough to be paid for the job they do and they are not likely to put themselves in danger for the sake of the sheep who they don't own. They have the problem that the sheep don't really trust them because they don't know their voice. Hirelings were the ones who couldn't save the sheep, the false prophets and causes.

Jesus gave this parable because He wanted the **Pharisees to realise they were the hired shepherds**. The sheep needed more than fences like the 10 commandments to live an abundant life. All the extra rules that they had made up only restricted freedom without love. The sheep need to feel loved and cared for and follow their shepherd of their own free will and recognise his voice. Something more had to be done. This eroded the Pharisees position as Shepherds of the people and they opposed Jesus because He was clearly implying that they did not hear the voice of God and the sheep were not following freely. The Pharisees would have **felt** attacked.

Salvation.

Shepherd in the OT had the meaning of **King and Messiah**. Jesus was claiming to be our Messiah who would save the people from their sins. In proclaiming this the **first thing** was that the Shepherd loved the sheep so much He was prepared **to lay down His life** for the sheep. Clearly Jesus was referring to His path to die on the cross so **Jews could have life**. The Easter message is that Jesus took His life up again so that Jews continue to be saved.

Jesus also refers to the sheep of another fold (v16) and the **second critical truth** is that **the Gentiles as well as the Jews would be saved by the Shepherd** who was prepared to lay down His life for the sheep of both folds. Gentiles could not be saved by the Pharisees and nor could they be saved by a Jewish Kingdom, so again the Pharisees

needed to step back so that all God's creation could be saved. That means us! We read later in the chapter many believed in Jesus.

Application

So practically how can we follow Jesus and hear His voice in our lives?

The sheep know Jesus and follow Him He leads us to the green pastures beside the still waters away from the wolves so we find rest in all the turbulence of our activity. This is where we can leave our anxieties. Jesus offers peace of mind that surpasses understanding and will guard our hearts and our minds. In faith we know that He has our best in mind.

Jesus knows us uniquely and loves us so we can trust Him, because He laid His life down for us. **Following** Jesus can be a risk, it means leaving the safety of the fold. Jesus may ask us to go somewhere we have not been before, or to speak to someone we would normally avoid, or to do something that is outside our comfort zone.

Are we **listening to the voice of Jesus the Shepherd?** Have we ever thought about our **vocation** as Christians? Is Jesus asking us to do a special service for Him? - something that uniquely fits our abilities and gifts, that only we can do? To what extent are we prepared to put our life aside so we can take it up for others? His burden is light – he will make sure that we are equipped for anything He calls us to do. Trying something new may not be easy and yet there will be gaps when Jane leaves us and God might just have an unusual role for us to play.

It may seem very difficult that we are losing our shepherd in Christ, Jane, but we need to remember that Jesus is the one whose voice we must learn to recognise. It is He who will guide us in the Vacancy, it is He who knows exactly how we feel and it is Jesus Himself who lies across the door of the fold to keep us safe.

Conclusion

Knowing the voice of Jesus is key in following in the way of Jesus. It is important to have a collective responsibility for each other so that we can make sure that all the sheep are managing to keep up. Remember young ones who also know the voice of the Shepherd, but we nurture them and bring them up gradually to a place of safety and a place of challenge.

Are we listening to the voice of Jesus? I pray that we will be filled with the love of Jesus the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for us and open to listen to what He is uniquely saying to each one of us today.