

Sermon Sunday 25th April 2021

John 10: 11 – 18 and Acts 4: 5 - 12

What image does the average urban/town dweller have of sheep and the shepherd? I suspect it is a fluffy image of lambs being held in the shepherd's arms or lambs running and jumping in fields in the spring. When I practised agricultural law, I encountered sheep and hard-working shepherds. Believe me sheep can be the most uncontrollable animals a lot of the time and can be quite violent if the lambs are threatened, when they will attack as a group. The shepherds are one of the most hardworking groups of people I have encountered, 24 hours a day raising and protecting the flock.

In verse 11 and throughout the reading from Johns Gospel today Jesus refers to himself as 'I am the good shepherd' which raises the image of the shepherd looking after and protecting his sheep, you and me. However, as true as this is, then and now this is not the message of the reading or the point Jesus wants to make. Jesus is showing who He is and His relationship with God the Father and what our relationship with them should be, like father and son. Verse 14 **I AM THE SHEPHERD; I KNOW MY SHEEP AND MY SHEEP KNOW ME JUST AS THE FATHER KNOWS**

ME AND I KNOW THE FATHER AND I LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR THE SHEEP.'

Jesus is stressing His relationship with His Father, who He was with when the world was created. This reminds me of the stunning words which open John's Gospel verse 2 'HE WAS WITH GOD IN THE BEGINNING.' Jesus is trying to show to the disciples, the Jewish leaders and the Jews who He was, the Son of God the promised Messiah from the Old Testament sent to save the world and its people. Of course, the Jewish leaders and many of the Jews did not accept this as we know they were plotting to kill Jesus because He was a threat to them and their power. So, if Jesus had just died like a good shepherd looking after his sheep we would not be here today worshipping; His death on the cross would have been just that.

The crux here for us I think is the relationship with God the Father. Like all relationships they must not be taken for granted. There has to be two-way communication for the relationship to work properly. Our faith lives depend on our personal relationship with God and Jesus grown by prayer study and putting Jesus' words into action.

Jesus is emphasising His relationship with God and I have to ask myself what is my relationship with God? I

have to admit it has not always been a bed of roses; there have been times when I have turned my back on God, mostly when I don't think the thing which God tells me to do is the one thing I want to do, my path into ministry is an example of this; getting very angry with God when Linda was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness twice, anger for myself and our two teenage sons. These were not good times but despite me and my anger God was always there for me and Linda and the family. I believe I came through these periods a stronger Christian, stronger in faith.

Let's return to the reading; in verse 16 Jesus says 'I HAVE OTHER SHEEP NOT OF THIS SHEEP PEN. I MUST BRING THEM ALSO. THERE SHALL BE ONE FLOCK AND ONE SHEPHERD.' This is one of the times when Jesus is emphasising His message or mission is not just for the Jews, it is for the gentiles or all people just like you and me. We are the people Jesus is talking about and all those people who currently do not believe. It is our job to tell people about God and Jesus and the sacrifice Jesus made for them. I pray for the day when this will happen and the different world it will be.

Jesus then goes on to emphasise in verse 17 that He is laying down His life and has the authority to take it up again; verse 18 'THIS COMMAND I RECEIVED FROM

MY FATHER.’ He is of course referring to his crucifixion and rising from the dead both acts for you and me to save us and we should never forget this sacrifice. Why, because it is through this and following God’s word and way that we too are saved and promised eternal life.

In verse 11 of the reading from Acts Peter tells the Sanhedrin that Jesus was ‘the stone you builders rejected which has become the capstone’ or put more simply the stone which supports all of us. Peter goes on to tell them there is no one else in whom salvation is found. That was the basis for the Disciples work and the reason for Jesus’ death and resurrection, to bring people to salvation and again I emphasise our role in this today as a Church and individuals.

I want to finish with final words of Matthews Gospel, the Great Commission {READ MATTHEW 28:16 TO END}. That commission from Jesus is still very relevant today for each and every one of us; our mission is to make disciples of all people and yes to return to the reference to sheep where we started, to make us all one flock under one shepherd, God the Father and God the Son Jesus Christ. Amen