John 10:1-10 – The Good Shepherd

A mother was once asked by a census-taker how many children she had. She replied, "Well, there's Billy and Harry and Martha and…". "Never mind the names," the man interrupted, "Just give me the numbers". The mother angrily replied, "They don't have numbers, they all have names!"

This might be a funny story, but in our modern world this is oh so true. We are often reduced to numbers and statistics, especially by the government, which seems to believe all we are is encapsulated in our National Insurance Numbers, recording almost all of our lifetime transactions.

Thankfully, our Saviour Jesus Christ is not like this. He knows each and every one of us by our names, just like a shepherd knows each and every one of the sheep in his flock. Personal names and identities are important to Jesus, who has intimate knowledge of us all. After all, **he is the Good Shepherd**. He knows us by name, and cares for each one of us.

In this time of lockdown, it's easy for us – especially those of us who live alone – to start thinking no one knows us, loves us or cares about us. We are just a statistic. It's simply not true. God knows, loves and cares deeply for each. He whispers his love for us. The church seeks as best it can to represent and replicate God's love: we know and care for one another, in his flock.

The Good Shepherd guides his sheep. Sheep have a reputation for not being the brightest animals in the world. However, they need a shepherd not because they are dumb, but because they know they can't go it alone. They need someone to lead and to guide them. When several flocks are grazing together in a field, you would think they'd get confused over who to follow, but actually they are still able to distinguish the voice of their own shepherd and follow his movements, clap, voice, etc.

Jesus is our shepherd. People who truly belong to God listen to and believe in the words of Jesus. We must distinguish his voice from all the other voices that daily clamber for our attention, and follow Him in faith. Jesus warns us about those who would lead people far from the truth, especially false teachers. The words of false prophets are like junk food. It looks so appealing, but a steady diet of their "spiritual junk food" will hurt us in the long run. Jesus' words are not always popular: we need to listen carefully to make sure we've heard him right. Wherever we are, we must make reading Scripture our priority, and pray we may hear him speak.

The Good Shepherd provides for his sheep. He leads them to good pasture. The current situation can mean we feel our emotional needs are in short supply. We miss the companionship, conversation, and laughter we are used to sharing with friends. We miss much of the purposeful activity, the projects we planned, the holidays we'd hoped for, and we can be inclined to think ourselves hard-done-by. But what Jesus offers is a truly full life: forgiveness, freedom from guilt and sin, and a life of real purpose and meaning on earth, not to mention everlasting life in the world to come.

Don't we all want to experience the joy of living and moving in grace-filled rhythm, in tune with something larger than ourselves? Don't we all want the sense that we are living and moving in perfect rhythm to the song of the Christian life? The alternative is to settle for a listless and lacklustre life of going through the motions and pursuing meaningless plans – life as mere existence. So, let's seek the gifts he offers us, continually following him and obeying him without reservation.

The Good Shepherd protects his sheep. In Biblical times, sheep were often placed in a fenced-in area at night for their protection. If the sheep pen had a gate, the shepherd could close and lock it and go home; however, many sheep pens did not have a gate. Instead, there was an opening. A shepherd would then lie across the opening to keep predators out. The sheep were safe inside.

Jesus is our shepherd: He provides the security of an eternal kingdom. We should look to him alone for our spiritual and eternal security. No forces other than our own can snatch us out of His good care and keeping. The devil is always looking for our vulnerabilities and to challenge whatever God has done, but be sure: Satan has no power to stop us from walking with God. He can never own us because we have been redeemed by Jesus' death and resurrection and we are forever in him.

We should be clear, particularly as we are especially alert to the dangers of disease at this time: Jesus' protection does not mean no bad things can happen to us or to those we love. We struggle. We hurt. We get ill. His protection does mean he guarantees to be with us whatever takes place. It does not mean we can expect a pain-free life. It does mean that through suffering we have the chance to grow in faith and display his glory. The Bible actually makes it quite clear that faith in Jesus Christ does not guarantee an easy life: instead, our struggles on earth are likely to increase. But staying faithful to the Good Shepherd, we will prevail.

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The shepherd who sleeps across the entrance to the sheep-pen knows he puts his life on the line from wild animals. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, has given his all for us. For us, he emptied himself of his deity and took on human form and became a lowly, humble servant, just like a shepherd. And for us, he surrendered his life, so, of the great flock of humanity, anyone who believes in him can become part of God's flock. That's how much the Good Shepherd cares for his sheep.

We can have all of the world's goods, but we would still be empty inside. The only person who can truly satisfy us is Jesus. If we allow Christ to live in us, we will have an abundant life. His love encourages us and empowers us so that we will obey him out of joy and thankfulness.

Indeed, we have an extraordinary amount to be thankful for. Jesus protects us from all evil. He provides for us abundant life. He guides us in right ways. He calls each of us by name. He loves us to death. **He is our Good Shepherd.**