

*May the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you , O Lord my God and my Redeemer.*

### **Sermon John Ch 10 11-18: The Good Shepherd – Sunday 25 April 2021**

Today our Gospel reading is about the Good shepherd. We may think, yes, we know Jesus is our shepherd and we are his sheep. We read it in other places in the bible - psalm 23 when we say or sing: the lord is my shepherd; and there are many references to this image of Jesus as the lamb of God. But perhaps there is more to shepherding, and this passage, than it appears.

When we think of shepherding, we might think of children's nativity plays: a small child with a tea towel on their head and a stuffed toy sheep - which stays in one place and doesn't cause a fuss! Or an idyllic sunny afternoon in the countryside with a shepherd in a flat cap, with lambs gamboling around - bliss!

But there's more to it than that! The life of a shepherd is hard. A recent episode of Country File showed that there was far more than we first imagine, in looking after sheep. The emotion, hard work and time they invest in looking after their flock is immense. During Lambing season there are multiple births to oversee and then touch and go moments where ewes might reject their lambs. And then throughout the life cycle of a sheep, the shepherd has to work hard and attentively. The shepherd invests his time to protect the sheep - whether from disease or predators - and to ensure they have enough food, water and shelter to enable the sheep to flourish and ensure they fulfil their potential – whether that's providing wool, birthing more lambs, or Sunday lunch!!

The shepherd does this because of his great care for his flock. And the sheep respond because they know his voice, and have a lifelong relationship with him. They recognise his call across a vast hillside as they know he is the one to provide their every need.

But as we know from the passage, the relationship is not just between the sheep and the shepherd. There are other characters: there is also the hired hand and the wolf.

At the time this passage was written, could the 'hired help' be the Jewish laws and traditions that some people thought would help them and protect them? But which often times clouded their ability to hear what Jesus was really saying? They couldn't hear his voice?

Today, could the hired hand, who seems like he is helping, but runs away at the first sign of trouble, be the trappings of everyday life and the ways of the world? The things that we think are important and will help us feel happy and secure - like a healthy bank balance, a promotion, a new car, a comfortable home with lovely garden? But when the times get really tough, we know that money, that job, that car, won't give us true comfort or security. These things are all fleeting and of our earthly desire.

And could the wolf be sin itself, trying to lure us away from the safety and protection of the shepherd? And the truth of the Lord?

In this day and age, are we at risk of losing our way and not hearing, or ignoring the lord our shepherd's voice, because we allow the hired help as in the trappings of life to distract us, and put ourselves at risk of temptation by the devil? Are we at risk of losing sight of the most important thing – Jesus, our ever loving and gracious shepherd?

Our Lord, the good shepherd, is faithful – he doesn't run away at the first sign of trouble or lead us to temptation. As the true shepherd, He cares deeply about his flock and lays down his life to save us. And we must learn to respond to his voice because we know he is our Saviour and Redeemer.

How can we do that today and prevent ourselves being so wrapped up in our own lives and distracted by the hired help and tempted by the wolf that we don't hear his voice? Maybe first we need to recognise that God might not be calling us with a heavenly host of angels, but with a gentle nudge in our hearts which helps us respond to his call.

That is the voice of justice, peace, hope and service - a call to do his work in today's busy life, whether at work, in our community, with our family or here in Church.

Hopefully, the end of the pandemic is in sight. We give thanks to God for bringing us through it and as we look ahead to the future may we be more aware of the call of our Shepherd and submit to his service, however small our offering may be.

We know the Shepherd's voice because through the Holy Spirit we are given discernment; Let us use that to strengthen our ability to hear what God is asking of us here today, to spread the word of a loving faithful shepherd who gave his life for us on that first Easter Day.