

St Marc, Grenoble  
Sunday 8th May 2022  
Acts 9: 36 - 43  
**John 10: 11 - 30**  
**'Tell us Plainly'**

Good Morning to everyone, both here and on Zoom.

It is good to be back, after our trip to the ICS Conference, which was refreshing, but also gave us some very useful updates about what is going on in ICS Churches around Europe and further afield.

### **Let's Pray**

In the Church in Wales, 4th Sunday of Easter, is known as 'Good Shepherd Sunday', because this reading from John 10 is always read on this Sunday.

### **I wonder what you made of it - What jumped out at you??**

John 10 is a chapter I find very meaningful – especially the shepherd imagery. I spent a long period of my life living in the Derbyshire Peak District in England, where I learnt a lot about sheep, sheep farmers and shepherds.

It's noticeable that Jesus often calls us His sheep and His lambs, but maybe sheep have more in common with us humans than we may initially think.

Sheep are interesting animals. They can be very stubborn and stupid, but they all have individual personalities.

But, I was always fascinated how my farmer friends recognised each one, (they all look the same to me!) and could even give me a life story of each sheep; many they'd known, of course, since birth.

Sheep are very timid, or skittish; they won't come near strangers and don't trust people they don't know. But their shepherd can hand feed them, check their feet, trim their hooves, even clip their fleece because the sheep know him and trust him. It's hard to know how they identify him, because their sight isn't good; but they recognise his voice, even from a long way off, and come when he calls.

In the Holy Land, shepherds bring flocks (often several) into a stone pen or sheepfold at night; it helps to keep the sheep warm, and protects them from predators - like wolves. Sometimes a shepherd sleeps across the gate. In the morning each shepherd calls his own sheep from the pen and leads

them out through the gate for the day's grazing – the path to life? Middle Eastern shepherds always lead (not drive) the sheep, calling as they go.

We read in the earlier part of this chapter (John 10) that Jesus used this wonderful word picture to show his relationship with us.

But, there's a bigger picture. Shepherd imagery was traditionally used to describe kingship, this possibly dates back to King David, who was, of course, a shepherd boy when he was anointed by Samuel (on God's instructions) as the future king of Israel.

There's a lot in Jesus' shepherd word-picture. He says He is the gate for his sheep; in other words **The** way into life – fulfilled life! And, Jesus the shepherd (kingly connotations) leads us through that (narrow) gate into the correct path of life.

He leads us the correct way – in another place He said I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

So, let's get back to today's Gospel reading; John notes it was the Feast of Dedication – otherwise called Hanukkah, a celebration of an occasion around 167 BC when the Judeans led by Judas Maccabaeus kicked the occupying forces of Antiochus Epiphanes out of Jerusalem; resulting in Judas and his family being recognised as kings, starting a dynasty which lasted 100 years.

Three years to the day after the occupation, they solemnly purified the Temple, offered sacrifices and prayed that God would never allow them to suffer such an affront again.

This highlights the concern by the Jewish scholars as to whether Jesus was indeed Messiah – come to free the people of Judah, once again, from the tyranny of occupation. But, of course, although Jesus was the Messiah, he wasn't the sort of 'deliverer' they'd been expecting.

So this was a truly explosive time for Jesus to be claiming that He is the Good Shepherd, and - as they would understand, the long awaited Messiah; God's anointed, the King of Kings.

But the Judeans surrounded Him and demanded He should confirm or deny His claim; 'How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah' they said 'say so out loud'.(Tell us plainly!)

Of course, Jesus did not back down 'I already told you and you didn't believe'. (But) The works I am doing in my Father's Name give evidence about me. i.e. What more proof do you want??

'You don't believe, because you don't belong to my sheep (my Flock)

Jesus affirmed: 'My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me. I give them the life of the coming age. They will never, ever perish and nobody can snatch them out of my hand. I and the Father are one.'

This was dynamite, 'Blasphemy' to the Judeans, and we're told later in the chapter that they picked up stones to stone Jesus; they tried to arrest Him, but He managed to get away from them.

Jesus came to lead people (people just like us and including us) back to God, like sheep to a sheepfold. While the Judean people had been longing for a Messiah who'd kick out the Romans, return Judea to the Judeans, and go back to the idea of an 'easy, more comfortable life' without the tyrannical occupation of the Romans.

Jesus' intended mission, on the other hand, was to lead everyone who'd follow Him, like sheep following the shepherd, back to God and to introduce them to the concept of eternal life – living face to face with God and worshipping Him in the amazing security of His presence.

Jesus explained this eternal life wasn't only for the Judean people, it was freely available to anyone who'd listen to His voice – the shepherd king – and follow Him towards the new life in God's eternal presence.

In the eyes of the religious Jews, that was outright blasphemy, because they considered themselves God's only chosen people and they could not accept that anyone else, especially Gentiles, like us, were entitled to be close to God.

But Jesus invites every one of us to hear His voice, and follow him, like sheep following a 'good shepherd' to the safety of God's sheepfold. We all need to listen out for the firm and comforting leadership of our saviour's voice in our daily lives and to follow Him where He leads us – into the Father's presence.

Too often we paint the 'Good Shepherd' as a cosy, peaceful, gentle leader; but these were challenging words. What Jesus was saying was dynamite, a direct challenge to the self-promoting religious leaders of the day.

On the Sunday of our AGM it's important for us to remember our faith is definitely not cosy, we mustn't ever become complacent. We're called to follow Jesus, in counter cultural ways: healing the sick, caring for the poor and rejected. Loving God with everything we have, and loving and caring for our neighbours as ourselves. Not easy?!

Expect that Jesus will be calling you; and, what He calls you to do may not be easy ... Following Jesus was never going to be easy!

Jesus understands and expects that, like sheep, we'll often go wrong and astray; but He'll come and find us and lead us back to the safety and security of His fold, living face to face with God, basking in the joy of His presence.

So now, as I close, let's pray and let's ask the Holy Spirit to open our ears to the voice of the Saviour, the Good Shepherd and trust Him to lead us, in the right way, home to God's eternal presence.