

God the Son – The Good Shepherd. -Sunday 25th April 2021
Acts 4:5-12; 1John3:16-24; John 10:11-18.

Today we are going to have a look at what Jesus meant by saying “I am the Good Shepherd”

In the reading from John we know that there are those who do not care for the sheep as well as the owner. There are those like robbers who try to force the sheep to follow them. There are those who are hired hands. They are paid for the job, but have no commitment or ownership of the flock they are tending. When things get difficult they are likely to run away, and leave the sheep to fend for themselves.

Jesus is called the Good Shepherd. He is the owner. He is the one who will stay with the flock through thick and thin. He will make sure each one is cared for - fed , watered, loved and able to wander on the hills safely. Jesus leads the way, v3,4. There is no coercion, but a willingness to follow, because the sheep trust the shepherd. I read a lovely story of someone traveling in Palestine, who saw a shepherd take his sheep across a ford. The sheep did not want to go. So the shepherd picked up a young lamb and carried it across. The mother of the lamb wanted to be near her child and followed. The rest of the flocked followed. The shepherd had shown that it was safe, that he had gone before and it therefore was not dangerous. Jesus goes before us. He will not let us be harmed. He is the good shepherd who cares for his sheep.

What does it take for us to be the sheep of the good shepherd?

Metaphors are helpful, but we need to take them at face value. What do we have to do to become a sheep that belongs to the Good Shepherd. Verse 1 (chapter 10) gives us the answer. We need to enter by the gate. The gate is Jesus. It is only through Jesus that we have direct access to God. v9 “Whoever enters through me will be saved.” and in v 10 Jesus says “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full”.

How many of us feel that we live life to the full? Jesus has told us that that is the reason that he came to this earth. If we can only begin to grasp the meaning of those words, wow what a gate it opens for us. Jesus knows his sheep and they know him. They recognise his voice, they come to him when he calls. When we come to the Father through Jesus, the gateway, we can have life to the full. The reading from Acts says that “There is salvation for no one else, for there is no other name under the heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved”. Jesus laid down his life for us and he asks us to respond by loving one another, not just by words but by truth and actions. It is like the sheep that recognise the shepherd’s voice because he has cared for them and they can trust him. Others will trust us, because they will see by our actions that we care. The caring that we do should be direct response to the fact that we know that Jesus cares for us.

As a worshipping community of believers, our part is to pray that God will make us aware of the needs of those around us and to allow God to use us in caring for those he brings us in touch with. We shall then allow God’s care and love to shine through our own lives and witness to the fact that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who loves his sheep and gave his life for them as it says in 1John 3: v16 “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

We are told what love is, but how do we enable that love so to transform us that we grow more and more like Christ, so that we can willingly say that we would even lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters?) Verse v17 reads “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”

We do not have to go far to know that there are many people in need at this time, through poverty, war, refugees, earthquakes, the list is very long. Can we honestly say that we are doing enough, as individuals and as the body of Christ? We are constantly reminded that “God is love”. We are commanded to love one another as he has loved us. If we keep this commandment then we know that he lives in us and that we live in him. We are called to be God’s instruments in expressing this love to others. Are we really listening to God and using our gifts in the right way? For me it is always deeply challenging to hear these words.

In this passage we are given examples of what happens if we love others. One thing is that when we follow Christ and learn from Him, we know that we have eternal life. We can count ourselves as no longer dead, but alive in Christ Jesus. If we hate people then we are told that we are like a murderer, and an unrepentant murderer does not have eternal life abiding in him. Strong, strong words.

God’s love is such that he laid down his life for you, for me, for each person that we love dearly, for each friend that we care for and also for those that we do not like and those whose company we avoid or ignore.

It is one of the dangers of preparing a sermon that I frequently get challenged in a very uncomfortable way. I have to confess that there are times when I choose to ignore that feeling and find a multitude of reasons why I should not respond. Maybe most of you are much better than I am. But it is important that with the help of God’s grace that we see him in others. That we ask the questions “Where are you God in the person I am talking to, writing to, looking at, thinking about, hearing about?” “Where are you God in the people that I find very difficult or those to whom I do not respond easily?” In our reading from 1John 3 it is not just a matter of word and speech, but it is how we behave and what we do.

God knows our inward thoughts and desires and we know that he abides in us through the Spirit he has given us, that is if we will allow that Spirit the chance to fill us anew each day.

What a challenge it is to put this into practice. We have Jesus’ own command that we should love one another. We cannot do this unless we love God with our whole heart, soul and mind. When we even begin to walk in God’s love, then we will be able to give thanks to God for all those with whom we come in contact, seeing what is of God in their lives, and encouraging them in the faith. v18 “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with action and in truth’.

A closing thought:

1John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.