

## **SERMON EASTER 4 8th May 2022**

A familiar sight in the bible is Jesus being accosted by a group of Jewish leaders who demand to know who he claims to be.

We are very familiar with this kind of harrying. It goes on all the time on social media.

People being harassed and attacked. And if they don't say the right thing they are cancelled by a small but persistent mob.

It is the modern equivalent of being hunted down by a lynch mob who want to destroy all trace of you. It's very unpleasant and shouldn't be allowed as part of any civilized society.

This is a similar atmosphere to the one that surrounded Jesus.

They want him to say the words "I am the Messiah" so that they can then have him charged with blasphemy and buy for his blood. But Jesus knows what they are up to.

He holds his ground and suggests that he has been pretty clear about who he is and has backed that up with signs and teaching.

Those with eyes to see have seen. Those looking for things to accuse him of have been unable to see what has really been happening.

And our perception and our belief is much more important than we realise.

I'm sure I've mentioned before my apparent lack of perception of things when I am looking for them – and I don't think I am unusual.

If I am looking in a cupboard for something and I don't believe that I will find it in there I often simply don't see it.

It can be there right in front of my eyes but if I'm not expecting to see it then I somehow simply don't.

If I then convince myself it must be in there because it couldn't be anywhere else then I open the door and there it is!

It's a strange and slightly disturbing phenomena.

But I think perception plays a much bigger role in seeing than we think.

So I sympathise a little with these Jewish people in their not being able to see the Christ in Jesus right in front of their eyes.

But I don't like the way they are trying to constantly trip Jesus up.

Jesus then spells it out for them.

You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.

27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

You, on the other hand, he suggests to them, are following someone else and something else.

Jesus describes his followers as his sheep.

Now if you are a Christian and you value your uniqueness you might be a bit put out by Jesus describing you as one of his sheep.

There is the modern perception that sheep merely blindly follow each other.

But if you are a decent shepherd you know you need to gain a sheep's respect.

If they are going to follow you they need to know that you love and care for them.

I had two sheep for a while who kept coming into the field where I kept my horses and I can tell you they are more switched on than people realise.

The sheep arrived just before Christmas in 2018.

They were two beautiful, young black and white Jacob sheep. And although I did my best to ignore them they decided they liked what was going on and they linked themselves to my little herd of horses and to me.

So when I used to arrive I not only had three horses heads looking intently at me but also two sheep. Staring at me. Like Shawn the sheep in Wallace and Grommit.

When I put the hay out they wanted to be eating the hay too with the horses even though that's not really what they eat.

When the horses had some pieces of apple they needed to have their little bit too.

And wherever I moved to. They followed me.

And when I left they stood at the gate and watched me go, wondering why I am not staying with them.

Even the horses didn't do that because they'd got what they'd wanted from me with their bowls of food.

The sheep saw me as their shepherd and they got comfort from being near me.

3 times the farmer who owned them caught them and took them back to his field.

3 times they jumped high walls and pushed through fences and made their way back to me and the horses.

It was like a reverse version of the lost sheep parable.

And like our scripture reading today, it is all about relationship.

It bothered me when I had to help the farmer fence them off and take them back again because it felt like I had betrayed their trust. I also knew the farmer would not have the same kind of relationship with them as I had had.

This is the other side of connection and relationship. It's the painful bit.

Jesus is the shepherd of the flock, and the flock is those who hear his voice and follow him.

It is about relationship. He knows them, each of them. He knows us best and loves us most.

Relationship...Our relationship with God Almighty and with his son. That is what this text is about.

Do you love God more than life?

Are you willing to follow Christ no matter where that takes you?

Are you ready to feed his sheep and tend his lambs?

Are you ready to think of yourself last instead of first?

When is the last time you made a sacrifice for heaven's sake?

Relationships...

Are you ready to give all you have and all you are and all you will ever be to the Lord who gave his life for you?

No pressure!

I'm just reminding you of the big questions that come with a committed relationship to one's faith.

And when we think of Our Lord, the Good Shepherd,  
what instantly comes to mind is the beautiful words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm has been memorized by Christians for centuries and  
Christians throughout history have recited these words daily.

It is one of those passages so full of poetry and deep religious meaning  
that it speaks directly to our soul.

At funerals where there is often no words we can meaningfully say,  
the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm take grief and hold it before the healing,  
welcoming, transforming arms of the Christ.

We know we are heard. We know we are met.

We may turn away from God. But God never turns away from us.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.

Lord you anoint my head with oil;  
And my cup overflows.

The voice of God calling us home  
like the prodigal child returning  
after juggling all those slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that life  
throws at us.  
The light fades and God calls us back for our tea

Lord you prepare a table before me

Our divine meal that heals everything.  
Love bids us welcome, as the poet George Herbert reminds us.

One vicar's response to the Good Shepherd story was to write about her  
dog.

She wrote:

My dog is a Cairn Terrier.

I buy the best food, pay huge vet bills for annual checkups, use the expensive flea and tick killer and the heart worm medicine.

Doogle sleeps anywhere he wants.

I worry about him and make sure he gets walked on a regular basis and has plenty of exercise.

I have a fenced-in yard just so he can run and chase squirrels.

Yet at the first opportunity the gate is left open or the door is open for a little too long, he runs wide open away from me.

I ask him, "Doogle, who would love you like I do? Why do you run from me?"

She writes:

There are times in my life I run the same way Doogle does, but I am running from God.

I know that God loves me, that God provides for me, that God protects me from myself. I can hear him calling my name. I recognize his voice and yet I bolt off alone, heading for disaster.

Do you ever do that? God is calling your name. He knows you. You are part of his flock. You know his voice.

It is all about relationship. And relationships can be complicated and make us do strange things.

But God calls to you.

So don't walk away.

For he's simply saying to you:  
Come on home.

Amen



If you do a lot of preaching on the bible. One theme comes up again and again. And that is: "Jesus the good shepherd"

I saw our friend Canon Chris Burdon yesterday, Chris as many of you will know is one of our retired priest helpers, and I said it's that Good Shepherd thing again.

What are you preaching on this Sunday. And he said: How can Jesus be both Lamb of God and Good Shepherd?

Good question Chris, I thought, so I took his idea and ran with it.

We know that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Our very own John the Baptist made a big thing of pointing to Jesus and saying:

"here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"

Jesus is, voluntarily, like a sacrificial lamb. An offering to God. The offering to end all other offerings.

Blood sacrifice becomes a thing of the past through his offering of himself and his divinely orchestrated death and resurrection.

And yet by accepting Jesus as the Lamb of God, we too become

### **JOHN10:22-30**

22 Then came the Festival of Dedication[b] at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. 24 The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

25 Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all[c]; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."