

25th April 2021 – Mark, Evangelist & Martyr – Chris's Sermon

John 10: 11-18

“...I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ...I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father...”

In our gospel reading today, we're reminded that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our shepherd. We're reminded that he is the voice of God – he is our teacher and our guide.

But, what does it mean for us to be guided by the good shepherd? What does it mean for us to listen to the voice of God? (These are important questions.)

As disciples, I think we are called to listen (to pay attention) – we must be willing to listen to the voice that speaks to us – the voice that offers teaching and guidance – the voice that affirms us and challenges us – the voice that calls us to follow, when we lose our way or become distracted. But, what does this voice sound like? Is it one voice or many? Is it loud or is it a soft voice? How do we recognise the wisdom of God?

In the Old Testament, we're told that Job heard the voice of God speaking to him from the whirlwind. Job was led out of darkness to a place of safety. But again, was it a loud voice or was it a soft voice? And, of course, Moses heard the voice of God speaking to him from the burning bush – a voice that led him out of the wilderness, along with his people. (Was it one voice or was it many – was it a voice from within or did it come from somewhere else?)

Job and Moses heard the voice of God and they listened to it – they allowed themselves to be led to a new place. And, along the way, they discovered a new way of living – a new hope and deeper meaning.

In the book of Acts (chapter 9: 36), we're told that the voice of God spoke to a girl named Tabitha, through Peter – calling her back to life. Was this the same voice that spoke to Job and Moses – or was it a different voice? Tabitha was called by the voice of God – called out of death and darkness into the light – she was given a new life.

In a way, I think these examples of calling show us that the wisdom of God – the wisdom of the good shepherd can be experienced in many different ways. The voice of God can be a loud voice or a softly spoken voice – it can be one voice or it can be many. The voice can come from within or it can come from somewhere else. Today we are reminded that the voice of our God can be heard all around us – it is the voice of compassion and forgiveness – it is the voice of reason and understanding.

Having said this, I'm very mindful that we live in a world filled with voices – filled with noise. Some of the voices that we hear carry a message of deep meaning and life. And, of course, some of them don't.

Some of the voices that we hear today tell us that we should only be concerned for ourselves – some voices tell us to live for the moment and our immediate needs. And, of course, these voices have encouraged us to strip our forests and neglect the poor – telling us to live for all the pleasure and power and wealth that we can gather, even at the expense of other people. (Some of these voices encourage terrible suffering and misery. In fact, some of our greatest cultures have been built on these foundations.)

These worldly shepherds – these worldly voices have contributed to a world where the powerful enjoy great wealth and privilege, while the poor and the vulnerable suffer in silence.

But, the Good Shepherd, as described in our reading today, speaks with God’s voice – sharing with us a very different message. The voice of God tells us that wealth and power are temporary. This voice tells us that only love is endless. The voice of God tells us that true and lasting happiness can come to us through commitment and self-sacrifice. (In other words, the voice of God is a voice of love and friendship and community.)

In our ignorance, I think we’re often tempted to listen to the worldly shepherds – the ones who tells us that strength and power will make us happy and content. But, of course, this isn’t true.

Robert Johnson, a well known Jungian psychologist, tells us that our modern western culture has produced a very advanced civilisation, in many ways. But, he also tells us that our science – our standard of living, our advances in travel and communication have all come at a terrible cost. He argues that our advances have had an impact on our ability to feel – our capacity to build strong relationships – to listen to the voice of God.

Johnson tells us that there is little room for feeling in a society that worships rationality and technology.

As I’ve said before, the language of the East Indian cultures (the language of Sanskrit) has 96 different ways to talk about love. The ancient Persian language had 80 words for love and we have 1 word for love.

The language of the modern world is not a language of love and peace and community.

As I’ve said, I think that if we developed our understanding of community and our awareness of the power of love, we’d probably be more focused on living with these blessings in our lives – they’d be a priority. (After all, love is a God word – relationship and friendship – these are God words.) While the worldly shepherds of today have helped us build 5G internet and electric cars, they don’t help us build happier marriages or stronger friendships.

I’m not anti-technology (I have a smart phone). But, I am much more interested in the wisdom of the good shepherd – the one who can help us to discover hope and deeper meaning in our lives.

I think we need a different language. And, for us, this is the language of the Gospels – the language of endless love and divine understanding – the language of death and resurrection. (Yes, this is the language of the Good Shepherd.)

So, I pray that this service today will remind us of our calling – our calling to listen carefully for the voice of God speaking to us – speaking from the whirlwind, speaking from the burning voice, speaking through the life of St Peter and all the saints, speaking through the people of this church, speaking in our hearts. And again, I would remind you that it can be a loud voice or a softly spoken voice – it can be one voice or many – and it can be a voice that comes from within or a voice from another place. I pray that we will listen and respond to the voice that calls to us.

The Lord be with you.