

SERMON NOTES Sunday 21st April 2024

sunnysidechurch

Theme: **The Good Shepherd**

Passages: **John 10.11-18, 1 John 3.16-24, Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34**

Some of the main themes from the sermon

Heads and hearts

This Gospel passage is a parable. Like all parables, it is drawn from the common life of Jesus' time. And, like all parables, Jesus told it to tease his hearers into active thought. It is also one of those bible passages where two very important things are happening at once. We are growing in our understanding of why Jesus died and, at the same time, we are learning more about the depth of his love for us.

God, Israel and shepherds

The relationship between God and his people was often seen in the Old Testament as between a shepherd and his sheep. Think of Psalm 23, for instance. The leaders of Israel were also expected by God to be good shepherds of their people. However, all too often they failed in their responsibility. Ezekiel 34 gives a caustic appraisal of the failure of the leaders of his time and of God's commitment to be a good shepherd to His people.

The conflict with the Pharisees

Our Gospel passage comes after Jesus has healed a blind man in Chapter 9. The Pharisees are divided by this healing (9.16). Some accept Jesus as a prophet but others repudiate the man who had been healed (9.28-34). This leads to Jesus talking about spiritual blindness (9.35-41) and likening the Pharisees to hired hands who don't really care for their sheep (10.12) and to 'thieves and robbers' (10.8). He, in contrast is the good (or the noble or the beautiful) shepherd (10.11-18).

The importance of Jesus' picture of himself as 'The Good Shepherd'

Jesus is making many things clear by calling himself the good shepherd. He is emphasising his closeness to God the Father (v15, v17). His relationship to the people of Israel is just like God's and quite different from that of the Pharisees. At the heart of his 'goodness' is his willingness to go to any lengths whatsoever for the good of his sheep (v11 & v15). This self-sacrifice is an outworking of Jesus and his Father's love for each other (v18). Jesus is 'being God' for his people. As

the letter of John puts it, 'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.' (1 John 4.10)

The difference it makes for us

Jesus says, 'I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold' (v16). Opening the door of his saving work beyond the Jewish people. Jesus' death and resurrection are for ALL those who turn to him as disciples, regardless of ethnic background. Jesus also says, 'I know my sheep and my sheep know me...' (v14-15). That being known with the same intimate knowledge that Jesus and the Father know each other is the source of the fullness of life that we have in Jesus.

Heads and hearts (again)

Let's look at the big messages from this parable and let it set light to our hearts and lives with love for the man who told it:

- Jesus, the Good Shepherd, loves so much that he willingly laid down his life for us.
- He knows us intimately and we know him and can trust him to always care for us; to give us what is best for us.
- When life is at its hardest for us, he will not desert us. His care is active and strong and committed.

Because we are loved so deeply, we are called to love deeply back, to trust deeply and imitate our Lord.

Some questions for thought and discussion this week:

It would be good, if you are in a house group to read all the four passages referred to in these notes. They complement each other in giving a panoramic view of Jesus, the good shepherd, his love for us and the response that his love calls us to.

1. ***Can you think of times when God has been present for you, when you were struggling with life? What difference did it make?***
2. ***Looking at 1 John 3.16-24. How have the actions and prayers of your fellow Christians helped when you have been in struggling?***
3. ***Looking at Psalm 23, particularly v4. Sometimes we feel the worst has happened. How do you react in times like these? Does your faith in the Lord our shepherd sustain you? If so, can you share with others in the group how it does so?***
4. ***The sheep follow the shepherd. What do you find hardest about following Jesus?***