

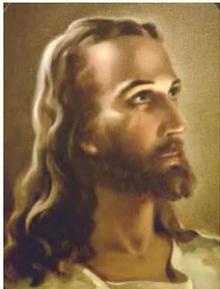
The Good Shepherd

Readings: *John 10:7-18, John 21:15-17*
Isaiah 40:11, Psalms 23:1



Introduction: Old Pictures

When I was in Primary School my parents used to drop me and my brother off to Sunday School at the Dandenong Methodist Church. Now, you'll find it hard to believe that I was a bit of a rascal in Sunday School so sometimes I would be sent to sit outside Mr. Williams office (he was the Sunday School superintendent). As I sat on a small wooden chair outside his office, hoping someone else would join me soon, I couldn't help but look at the serene, gentle picture of Jesus in soft hues, hanging there. I used to wonder if he ever got into trouble like I did and was sent to sit outside. The way he looked in that picture told me he was too good to be true. A number of these old pictures I think served to paint a false image of the God Incarnate who lived amongst us, who got his hands dirty, who cried, laughed, played, who got angry and got hurt just as we did as kids. Other images were, the blue eyed



Jesus or ones with beaming halos and then there is the Jesus that looks like he should be on the red carpet and then either appearing in the tabloids under best or worst dressed. Yet these pictures, possibly because of the serene, loving look of Jesus, I know have provided enormous comfort to many.

Jewish Jesus would have been much more rugged, darker and , some verses say unattractive. Then there is Jesus depicted as the good shepherd. Some pictures of Him are very pretty but so far from the real thing it is disturbing. Pink cherry blossom, a red headed Jesus, lush green hills, clean white sheep and Jesus in a pink dress!!! As opposed to the real thing dark, dusty, dry, dirty roads, sheep and shepherd.



The Shepherd Fields, are possibly the most uncommercialised holy site in Israel, where the shepherds saw the angels. They could see the birthplace of Jesus from here some 10-11 kms away. When I was there almost 2 years ago I saw shepherds like this one still there looking after their sheep.

1. Jesus the Good Shepherd

I was reading a book on Pastoral Ministry by Bruce Petersen and he talks about the pastoral image of the shepherd being a beautiful model for the Minister who is seeking to care for others but the sickly images of Jesus as a shepherd, he remembers from his childhood, caused him to reluctantly embrace this model



initially. Yet shepherds, were strong; they had to rescue sheep, then doggedly and determinedly find the lost one, stay out in all sorts of weather and they had to protect the sheep specially from the ones dressed in sheep's clothing!!!

This is where our passage in John starts. Jesus has just healed the Blind man and the Pharisees have set up a royal commission into what happened and how could that be, when Jesus talks about the shepherd, 3 times in fact because his audience, the Pharisees again just don't get it. They are like the wolves in sheep's clothing or here Jesus refers to them as the hired help. If Jesus is called the good shepherd, there must be bad shepherds around. Enter the Pharisees who ere not fulfilling the role of Shepherds as they should have been



doing. He reiterates he is telling the truth, and He is the gatekeeper. Shepherds literally slept across the opening of the sheepfolds whether it was an enclosure made of rocks or a cave, or a temporary fence, literally making themselves the gate. That is why Jesus says here I am the gate for the sheep. The sheep have to come into the

fold through me and then I provide protection for them with my own body as the gate. I wonder how often today Jesus stands between us and some evil foe, protecting us. And no one comes into the fold except through me, the gate. Like Jesus' claim, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Other religions say they know the way, or can reveal the way or point out there are many ways but only Jesus says I AM THE WAY. The sheep know my voice. Before me there were thieves and robbers who killed, stole and destroyed, this is what the Pharisees have done. Who do you know who has been stolen away? When have other voices tried to lead you astray? How have you known the protection of the shepherd? How do you know the voice of the shepherd? What has he said to you?

Sheep will be gathered together often at night into crowded sheepfolds with other flocks. To this day in the Middle East a shepherd will go into a crowded sheepfold and call out his own sheep one by one, naming them and they will recognize his voice and come to Him. As the shepherd knows the sheep, Jesus, too, knows our individual characteristics, our fears, our joys, our likes and dislikes. And what's more they know Him. If someone else comes to the fold and even if he calls the sheep by their right names they won't go near him. Alan sheep aren't dumb after all. They are listening for the voice that matters, are you listening for the voice that matters? How do you feel when he calls your name, are you comforted, worried, excited or puzzled? His sheep trust his voice so they don't need a sheepdog to drive them on or keep them in order, they just follow him. The original sheep Jesus first talks about are the people of Israel. But as Israel's prophets have always hinted, the God of Israel has never been interested 'only' in Israel. The other sheep he refers to are us, that great company from every nation under heaven yet to be saved through Jesus. This starts to get him into trouble. The picture of the Shepherd with his sheep in Scripture is frequently used to refer to the King and his people.

This is the image Jesus first chooses to explain his own claim to be the true king of Israel. This propels him on the mission he came to do. It won't long be after this where the good shepherd literally lays down His life for His sheep as the sacrificial lamb.



2. The Sheep

The sheep are known by Him so well, so intimately. They are known by name. How good it is when your name is remembered by someone, particularly someone we look up to. Apparently they say one needs to say a name at least 3 times for it to be remembered and recalled. Apparently at least once a day each sheep goes and seeks the shepherd and receives 'a pat and a chat'. Can you imagine the shepherd watching his sheep knowing all their likes and dislikes, their quirky characteristics and their differing temperaments? The Shepherd would know who were the princesses, the jokers, the dancers, the cool dudes and the militant ones. I am sure in our fold here we could identify with some quirky, endearing, rascally sheep.



It is also interesting to note that Jesus tells this parable during the The Festival of the Dedication of the Temple, also known as the Festival of Lights. We too have told this parable whilst celebrating a Dedication of one of our little lambs Ollie. Another light in our church, as one of the many children we enjoy and welcome. Today Joel & Shantelle have brought Ollie, a precious lamb to be dedicated. These little ones instinctively know the voice of the shepherd. We have a responsibility to ensure an environment where he and our other precious ones will always be welcome and able to hear the voice of the Shepherd. How are **you** fostering that environment here? We have committed Ollie to the great shepherd and have taken up the mantle of caring, loving and praying for him, what a privilege and what an honour. And our lambs, our beautiful children; we need to pray that we don't put any obstacles in their way. No judgements, no hushing them up for even at his young age, Jesus refers to children as his disciples. Not so long ago Anita read a "letter to a young mum". I just wanted to read a part of it to remind us of how important our children, our precious lambs are. I have spoken at other churches in town where there have been no children, where will those churches be in 10, 20 years time.



Dear Parents,

We've all been exasperated by dragging our little kids to church; but mums and dads, it's so very, very important. I know you're wondering, is this worth it? Why do I bother? I know you often leave church more exhausted than fulfilled. But what you are doing is so important.



When you are here, the church is filled with a joyful noise. When you are here, the Body of Christ is more fully present. When you are here, we are reminded that this worship thing we do isn't about Bible study or personal, quiet contemplation but about coming together to worship as a community where all are welcome, where we share in the Word and Sacrament together. When you are here, I have hope that these pews won't be empty in 10 years. They are learning how and why we worship NOW. They are learning that worship is important. It matters that they learn that worship is what

we do as a community of faith, that everyone is welcome, that their worship matters. When we teach children that their worship matters, we teach them that they are enough right here and right now, as members of the church community. They don't need to wait until they can believe, pray or worship a certain way to be welcome here. It matters that children learn that they are an integral part of this church, that their prayers, their songs and even their badly timed (or perfectly timed depending on who you ask) cries and whines are a joyful noise because it means they are present.

I know it's hard, but thank you for what you do when you bring your children to church. Please know that your family—with all of its noise, struggle, commotion and joy—are not simply tolerated, they are actually celebrated as you are a vital part of the community gathered in worship.

Thank You and God Bless you, as you do us.

Love Always Your Church Family (This post originally appeared at [I Am Totally That Mom](#))

3/ Only out of Love for Him

And we love and we care for our children out of love for Him. The passage in John 21 gives us a beautiful and yet serious picture of the mantle Peter was given to look after the lambs and sheep, when he encountered the Risen Lord.

It seems as if Peter has gone off back to his old trade, fishing. He has put behind him any idea of being the 'rock' Jesus spoke about. He has returned to the comfortable, the known, the familiar and possibly the 'easier' way possibly because of his guilt, because of his grief, because of his shame and because it all just got too hard. When have you given up a task or a ministry because it has just got too hard? What God given call have you turned your back on because you blew it, because you have felt unworthy or because it is just too hard? What will it take for you to take up that call again?



After they had finished eating Jesus asked Peter 3 times, Do you love me? And after each time commissioned him To feed my lambs and to feed my sheep. Peter's reply, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you", was all that was needed for this direction to feed my sheep. There was no because, you love me you will feed my



sheep, there was no if you love me you will feed my sheep, it was just you love me, then feed my sheep. Forgiveness was given in the form of a ministry or a reinvasion as in this case to an earlier call. How do we offer forgiveness? Do we entrust those we forgive, or those who are broken with a new task, with an invitation to minister?

This was like a second calling for Peter. The first time he met Jesus here, he followed; enthusiastically, rashly, obediently, naively, wholeheartedly but he had no idea what the call to follow Jesus meant that first time. He followed like a sheep. This time as Jesus stands before him and asks do you love me, Jesus commissions Peter to love his sheep. He is now being given the responsibility that was Jesus', he is to be the Shepherd. Peter knows full well what that means. He knows what it costs to follow Jesus, he knows what it will mean, He saw His Lord go through the life He was now calling Him to. Abandonment, denial, being misunderstood, loneliness, persecution, mockery and death: this time Peter knew because he could see the shadow of the cross and in the next verses Jesus informs him of how he will die. Last time Peter just didn't get it, this time he gets it all too well!! This time Peter knew what, 'life in all its fullness' was going to cost. All too often we can give people a false idea that following Jesus will be all rosy and good and all your worries and cares will disappear. How untrue!! What false teaching!! When you are inviting others to follow Christ, do you really let them know what it will cost? How do you do that? What has following Christ cost you? Jesus is saying to Peter that feeding, supporting and loving the sheep is going to cost him. How does supporting the sheep, those whom you care for, those whom we as a congregation have committed to caring for, how does it cost us? What is the price we pay?

There was a cost for Peter and if there is a cost for us what is it that will sustain us? Jesus' threefold question was not for Himself, but for Peter. He asked His questions to underscore the essential truth that only love for Christ would sustain Peter in the work that lay ahead—that arduous, demanding work of caring for people's souls—perhaps the hardest work of all. Jesus did not ask Peter if he loved His sheep, but if he loved *Him*. Peter although still clumsy, became the man of God Jesus knew he would because Christ's love for him and his love for Christ sustained Him miraculously and courageously right to the end. Affection for God's people in itself did not sustain Peter nor will it sustain us. His sheep can be unresponsive, unappreciative, and harshly critical of our efforts to love and to serve them. In the end, we will find ourselves defeated, discouraged and burnt out.

The "love of Christ"—our love for Him—is the only sufficient motivation that will enable us to stay the course, to continue to feed the flock of God. Thus Jesus asks you and me, "Do you love Me? Then feed My sheep." And if we answer yes to that He will provide us with the means to do that.

Conclusion: Where are we meant to be?

Sort of simple. As we shepherd and care for one another, we gain our impetus, our refreshment, our love, our strength, our compassion and rest as we love and are loved by Jesus, the Shepherd. He leads and guides those who have young, both parents and congregations, and so as we do the same we need to remain close to his heart. Maybe you have never known the love of Christ for yourself, I assure you He knows you and your name and is waiting with open arms for you to come to Him. He has already shown His love by dying in your place for all the muck and wrong stuff you have done, ask His forgiveness and come. Maybe you have been a Christian for a long time and have somehow thought you have had to grow out of the need to snuggle in close to the Shepherd. He does not think that!! Do you snuggle in? Do you hear His heart beating as you rest there? Do you hear Him gently saying your name and telling you how much He loves you? Do you tell Him that you love Him? Who are the lambs and sheep He is asking you to feed? And as you feed them, no matter how difficult it might become the Lord is your Shepherd and you have everything that you need. Jesus asks us, Do you love me? If your answer is yes, then love Ollie and all our lambs and love one another!!



BAAMEN!!

Ange van der Leeuw
20/3/16

