

Reflection - The Fourth Sunday of Easter
21-04-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 4: 5-12	Peter filled with the Holy Spirit explains how the man was healed in Jesus' name and that salvation is only through Jesus
Psalm 23	The Lord is my Shepherd
1John 3:16-24	We do not love with words and tongue, but with actions and truth
John 10: 11-18	The Good Shepherd knows his sheep, And lays down his life for them

Introduction

Good Morning Everyone, and welcome to Worship.
This morning, I would like to focus on our Gospel reading where Jesus claims to be the "Good Shepherd".

I would like to explore firstly, how we see God as Jesus describes himself as a "Good Shepherd", and secondly, what that might mean for us, if we consider ourselves as the "Sheep" that belong to the "Good Shepherd".

Jesus as the "Good Shepherd"

So, let's begin with the image Jesus gives us of himself.
The image of the "Good Shepherd".

Sheep and Shepherds were a common part of the agrarian life in which Jesus lived when he carried out his physical, earthly ministry. It was an image that would have been easy for the people around Jesus to relate to. In the Old Testament writings, the Scriptures that Jesus had, and referred to, the image of the shepherd was often used to describe the leaders of the Jewish people.

And of course, the people of Jesus day would have known the psalms intimately, especially Psalm 23 where God is actually the Shepherd who cares for the sheep.

So, Jesus used an image that the people of his day would have been very familiar with. Do we have any shepherds in the congregation today? The image may not be as familiar for us today, as many of us don't have such direct connections with our food sources. But the image of the "Good Shepherd" is enduring, and we can still feel its meaning.

Jesus uses the image of the “Good Shepherd”, to convey that he, himself will provide safety and security for those who are his sheep.

I want you to take a moment now, and think of someone who you feel safe with, or maybe a place where you feel safe. It could be a parent, or maybe your wife, or your husband, or it might be your home, or it might be something totally different for you. Just think of somewhere, where you feel safe.

This feeling of safety and security is the image I believe Jesus is trying to convey when he names himself as the “Good Shepherd”.

Jesus wants us to know that when we come to him, we are coming to safety and security. What wonderful, good news that is. When we listen to John’s Gospel today, we can know that there is a place of safety we can enter into, and the way to this place is Jesus.

But Jesus doesn’t stop there, at just knowing we can feel safe and secure with him. Jesus goes beyond what the Jewish people would have expected of a shepherd. In verse 11 today we hear Jesus say,

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Jesus goes beyond just being a carer of the sheep, like the hired hand, who Jesus says will run away at the sign of danger. Jesus sets himself up as the owner, who is willing to even die for the sheep.

But note that Jesus is not sacrificed like a lamb, that has no say in the matter. Jesus very clearly lets us know that he has chosen to lay down his life for us. And Jesus lets us know he has the ability not only to lay down his life for us, but also to take it back up again.

So, Jesus provides not only a feeling of safety and security, but a place where we can be secure with God for all eternity. This is made clear in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles this morning, as we hear Peter declare this of Jesus,

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

The Sheep under the care of the “Good Shepherd”

So, if Jesus is our “Good Shepherd”, what does it mean for us to be his “Sheep”. In today’s gospel reading, Jesus gives us these words,

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.”

If Jesus is the “Good Shepherd”, and we are Jesus’ “Sheep”, then we will want to know Jesus.

How well do we know Jesus? How often do we listen to Jesus?
What do we do, day by day to stay close to Jesus?

Just as sheep follow the shepherd to get looked after, we need to be following Jesus, if we are going to know and feel the security that Jesus offers us.

Accepting Jesus, allows us to know God’s peace in our lives. Not a peace based on wishy washy feel good psychology, but on the God who created the universe, in which we exist, and a God who is made known to us in the person of Jesus.

Daily prayer and bible reading, regular worship, studying the scriptures and the Christian faith with others, are all things that we can do to continue to know Jesus in our lives. They are quite straight forward things, but they all require time. In the image of the Shepherd and the sheep, the two stay together. They don’t wander off separately, but rather the Shepherd leads and the sheep follows. To know Jesus, we will need to spend time with Jesus.

There is nothing we can do to earn the salvation that Jesus offers us. Following the shepherd doesn’t save us. Jesus achieved that by laying down his life for us on the Cross, but as Jesus followers now, as his “Sheep” now, we are called to follow Jesus today.

So, we should want to be gathering together to strengthen our faith in what Jesus has done for us. And we should be wanting to share the love of Jesus with others. In the first letter of John today we hear:-

¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷ How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? ¹⁸ Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

So, being Jesus’ “Sheep”, will involve us showing God’s love to others. Not only by sharing the “Good News” of Jesus with them, but also by providing for those who are in need.

I’m grateful for the generosity of our congregation as we provide for “Fred’s Place” and “Agape”, and how we support mission agencies with Humanitarian Aid Projects. These are the things we should be continuing to do if we are Jesus’ “Sheep”.

Conclusion

As we hear the imagery of Jesus as our “Good Shepherd” today, I pray that we will know and feel how much we are loved by God, and that we will be assured of how safe and secure we are in God’s love.

And I also pray that with the clear knowledge of how loved we are by God, we will be enabled to go about our daily lives, sharing that love with those around us, both in word and in deed.

Amen.