

4th Sunday of Easter – Good Shepherd Sunday (Stoke Doyle & Titchmarsh)

I am the Good Shepherd (*Gen 7.1-5, 11-18; 8.6-18; Ps 23; Acts 4.5-12; John 10.11-18*)

After the resurrection, everything changed, because one man died a very public humiliating death on the cross but rose again. Dead men don't rise from the dead. No-one rises from the dead (this wasn't a resuscitation - this was resurrection). So it was only normal to ask the question – who is he? What is he, who can do this? Who is this man?

After the resurrection, the disciples started to reflect on everything that Jesus had said of himself during his lifetime. And so we, four weeks after Easter, on this Good Shepherd Sunday, are doing the same. We turn to one of the great 'I am' sayings in John's gospel. 'I am the Good Shepherd'. There are seven 'I am's', what marks 'I am the Good Shepherd' out is that all the others are impersonal – 'I am the bread of life', 'I am the light of the world', 'I am the resurrection' But when Jesus declares 'I am the Good Shepherd' he is not only telling us about who he is, He is also giving us a wonderful insight into how he feels about us and why he does it. So, this morning / evening three among so many more that I believe are really important things to note.

**First**, Jesus knows you and me. v14 'I know my sheep and my sheep know me.' Shepherds know every one of their sheep. A preacher who had been a shepherd tells the story of being on a train with another shepherd. A few weeks before the train journey the friend had been to market and had sold his lambs. As they were pulling out of a station, they passed a field with a flock of sheep and the shepherd friend commented 'Look, there are four of my lambs in there!'

What does Jesus know? Well just as shepherds know sheep are vulnerable sheep in need of protection. Jesus knows our knows our humanity – that we are very mixed up. He knows us by name and knows all our individual quirks. He sees past the bits we like people to see. He sees the bits we hide, the shameful bits, our failures, our selfish motives, our insecurities and our fears. He sees beyond the image, into our very being.

He says 'I know you...' And of course, our fear is that when someone really knows us, they won't like what they see and will reject us. But that's not Jesus. Jesus is willing to die for us, which is all the more remarkable given the fact that he knows us so very well! Our response might well be: 'Seriously, you would die for me! Even when you know what I am really like! And Jesus answer is Yes! v11 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. v12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. v13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. v14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, v15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. In this is, a profound Easter message. That little word 'for' – in the Greek means 'in the place of'. 'I lay down my life in place of the sheep'.

**Secondly**, Jesus is saying 'I love my sheep so much that when the wolves come, I become like a lamb for them to kill, in the stead of you - I become the sacrificial lamb'. He is effectively saying 'I would lose anything rather than see my sheep die. I would rather lose my life, I would lose even my glory, rather than see my sheep perish.' Comparing us with sheep, might not feel very complimentary – for they are defenceless, foolish and needy creatures But that's precisely the point – that despite our vulnerability, that despite our selfishness and independence, Jesus prizes us so much, that he would give up everything and die in our place.

There is no greater affirmation of your worth and mine than this. Jesus looks at your past and my past and sees everything, even the hidden stuff. He looks at your future and my future – and the mistakes and wrongs we are yet to make, and he looks into our hearts, all the way to the bottom. And Jesus says 'I see you as so infinitely precious, that I would rather give up my life than see you die.' When someone really knows us, yet accepts us and wants to stick with us, such that they will sacrifice all sorts of things for us, only then do we know that we are ok, that we are likeable and loveable.

And **thirdly**, Jesus calls you and me by name. It's very easy to assume that he calls us by the name our parents gave us. But again and again, God gives people a different name to the one their parents gave them. Think of Abram becoming Abraham or Simon becoming Peter and numerous others. Something very rich to ponder on – it speaks of your uniqueness and mine; it speaks of your significance and mine. Something quite fun to explore I guess, might be, what heavenly name you think he has given you.

But the point of new names in scripture is that they describe something about the person and their purpose. They in some way draw us to think about our mission, what God may be calling you and me to. Simon was named Peter because he was going to become a rock. Abraham – because he was going to become the father of multitudes. To each of us, he has given a mission – a calling on our life. He has a purpose for you and me. To start with, it may be a calling to be where we are. We are called to the place we live in. We are called to the place where we work. We are called to our families. Wherever we are – God has called us – to do the work that he has prepared in advance for us to do. And as his calling unfolds it may lead us in all kinds of directions to all manner of destinations. I wonder what call he is whispering in your ear today?

## Conclusion

So here is the question – the Good Shepherd is calling you by name. Will you follow him? He knows you – the real you. He would give up anything for you and has done so. He has a purpose for your life. If you have said yes, before – perhaps today is a good time to confirm that yes. If you've never said yes before – maybe today is the day to say yes for the first time. I am going to say a prayer – you may like to echo it in your heart.

*Lord Jesus, thank you that you know me better than I know myself and yet consider I am worth sacrificing your life for me. Thank you that you have a purpose for my life and that you are calling me to follow you as my good shepherd. I choose to follow you, to turn from all other paths, and trust you to lead me through life. In Jesus name. Amen*