

SERMON – 25/4/21
'The Good Shepherd'

John 10:11-18

“There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them too; they will listen to my voice and there will be one flock with one shepherd.” (John 10:16)

What do you think about sheep? Maybe you don't think very much about them, and maybe you don't have very much experience of them. In my former parishes in the Borders you didn't have to look very far to see sheep and on unfenced single-track roads you often didn't have to travel very far before you literally came face to face with one.

Although they are perhaps not so all-pervasive around here in Kinross, actually you don't have to go very far from town before you will come across sheep and at this time of year there's nothing quite so uplifting as the sight of lambs gambolling in the fields.

But what do you think about being compared to a sheep yourself? It's not the most flattering of images and yet it is one that is often found in the Bible. Isaiah writes: “All of us were like sheep that were lost, each of us going our own way.” (Isaiah 53:6) We know that to be true. And if we are to call upon the Lord as our Shepherd, as we have done in worship this morning, then we are by default acknowledging ourselves to be sheep.

There is an old children's song which will be familiar to many of you:

“I am a sheep (baa baa) and I like to be well fed
But like a sheep (baa baa) I'm a little stupid in the head
I go astray most every day, oh what a trouble I must be!
I'm glad I've got the good shepherd looking after me.”

I don't think I'm alone in recognising that I am more than a little stupid in the head a lot of the time and that I must make a lot of trouble for God. I hope I'm not alone in saying that I'm glad I've got the Good Shepherd looking after me.

It was Jesus, the Good Shepherd, that we read about this morning and there is a lot in what He says about Himself that reminds us why we should be

glad to be part of the flock of God and glad to have the Good Shepherd looking after us. Let me highlight three things:

First of all we are given the comparison between the Good Shepherd and the hired hand. The hired hand doesn't have a personal vested interest in the sheep – he may draw a wage for putting in the hours doing his job but if it comes to the crunch, if the sheep are being threatened by a wolf the hired hand runs for his own life leaving the sheep to their fate. The hired man doesn't care about the flock but about himself – not so the Good Shepherd, who Jesus says is willing to die for the sheep. Why, because He *loves* them. And that is what we each need to be reminded of today – you may sometimes not think yourself worth very much, a bit like a sheep, a bit of a nuisance sometimes, but when Jesus looks upon you it is in love and with tender care. He provides for you, leading you to places of nourishment and refreshment, renewing your strength and guiding you in the right way, protecting you in the darkness or from the wolf who threatens to snatch you away or scatter the flock. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, not a hired hand. Jesus loves you.

Secondly, we are shown how through Christ we are taken up into a relationship with our heavenly Father, the Lord of eternity. “As the Father knows me and I know the Father, says Jesus, in the same way I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” (v.15) Although these words are very straightforward they open up for us a very deep pool of grace – from before the beginning of all things the Father and the Son, the Creator and the Word were in perfect union, knowing each other intimately and completely. *In the same way*, Jesus tells us here, the Good Shepherd knows the sheep, Christ knows you and me – intimately and completely – and that means that we, though we are earthbound, though like sheep we have gone astray, we are taken up by Jesus into union with God, perfectly safe and eternally secure. We probably need to be reminded of that today too. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Jesus knows you as you are and still loves you, and through Christ the Good Shepherd we will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

And thirdly, for in fact Jesus has already said this twice already in the two sections we have just looked at, we are reminded that the Good Shepherd is willing to die for the sheep; Jesus is willing to die for us; He is willing to give up His life – no-one takes it from Him, no, He offers it of His own free

will and just as He had the right to give it up He also had the right to take it back. Christ died for us but He also rose again for us – He is risen indeed. Here is the guarantee of our faith: dear flock of God, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He knows you and He loves you so much He was willing to give His life for you so that you might have life in all its fulness and rise again with Him on the last day. It may be beyond our taking in sometimes, but the Shepherd offered His life so that the sheep might be saved eternally.

Now, I could stop there and we could very fruitfully meditate on all that Christ the Good Shepherd is to us and all that He has done for us and all that He has promised to us. I hope that you will do that in response not only to those three things I have highlighted from our this morning's reading but also in response to what we have celebrated musically today in the 23rd Psalm and in what Katy-Beth shared with us through the story of the lost sheep (which of course represents each one of us).

But what I want to hold up most of all for you this week is those words of Jesus in verse 16 with which I began: "There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them too; they will listen to my voice and there will be one flock with one shepherd." This is so much on my heart and I really want to impress it upon you today. How can we reflect and revel in the fact that the Good Shepherd knows us and loves us and gives His life for us and takes it up for us again and not recognise that that message is not only for us but for others who as yet have not heard this life-changing Good News.

Jesus says, "There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheepfold." Who are these sheep? Well, they are people like you and me but who have not yet been 'telt' (to take up last week's theme) or who have not yet 'felt' that they belong to Christ. They are members of your family, they are your neighbours, they are the children who play in your street, they are the young people who wander aimlessly around town, they are the grown-ups who have not yet found anything in life that truly satisfies them or who are looking in entirely the wrong place for fulfilment, they are the older folk whose life has past them by and who have no hope. Once, Jesus looked out on a huge crowd and we are told that 'His heart was filled with pity for them *because they were like sheep without a shepherd*' (Mark 6:34) Jesus looks on the crowds of our community with the same shepherd's pity today. So many people are lost. Do you share that yearning?

Jesus says, “I must bring them too. They will listen to my voice.” How shall they hear who have not heard? It will be from our lips, unless we choose not to speak but to keep the gracious message to ourselves. Do you not share that yearning for the lost sheep of our time? Mustn't we bring them too? Can't we make the voice of Jesus heard in our day?

Jesus says, “There will be one flock with one shepherd.” It is part of my calling that I have a pastor's heart. It is in my nature to draw people together, to unite and to reconcile, and it breaks my heart to see God's people close themselves off to others, to watch the flock of God segregate and fragment, you in your small corner and I in mine. There *is* only one Shepherd, the Good Shepherd and in Christ there *is* only one flock and it is part of our calling as the Church of Christ to demonstrate that in the world. If you *don't* know the Good Shepherd, then come to Him today – He's out looking for you right now, whether you know you're lost or not. And if you *do* know the Shepherd, then join Him in the task of bringing others into the fold.

May Jesus bring rest and nourishment and refreshment and guidance and protection and life not only to us but to our family and our neighbours, the young and the old, to those we know and love and to those who are as yet strangers, and may there be one flock with one shepherd, the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Saviour and our Lord. Amen.