

Vocations Sunday Sermon Notes

Acts 4.5-12; Psalm 23; John 10.11-18

The call originates from the Good Shepherd

Our bible readings today focus upon the image of the shepherd. We are reminded in our famous Psalm that the Lord is our Shepherd, whilst in our gospel reading, Jesus draws on that image to declare that he is the *Good Shepherd*.

Shepherding is very different in the Middle East to what we are used to in England. Here, the abundance of green grass and pastures means that shepherding is a very static activity. The flock stays in the same place and whilst they may move from field to field, the shepherd's role is about management rather than movement. In comparison, in an environment where food and water are scarcer, there is a greater emphasis on the shepherd to lead the flock to fertile places where their hunger can be sated and their thirst quenched. It is this *good* shepherd we see in Psalm 23, who leads the sheep to still waters and green pastures. The movement of the flock requires them to go through dark valleys to reach their destination. The experience of a Middle Eastern sheep much more resembles the ups and downs of human life because of the constant movement between safety and danger as well as scarcity and abundance.

Both our readings remind us today of the need for a loving guide through life in the form of the shepherd. Our gospel reading reminds us of the difference between a shepherd and a hired hand with the shepherd intimately caring for the flock and therefore being willing to love the sheep to the point of laying down their life. This is a lovely reminder of a gospel truth that we have a God who intimately cares for each one of us to the point that Christ lays down his life on the cross for us. We have a good shepherd.

Our readings also remind us that an outworking of that care and love is that the shepherd speaks to the sheep. The shepherd calls to us. Earlier in John 10, we are reminded that the sheep know the shepherd because they hear his voice. We have a God who loves to speak and call to us, the question is are we listening?

The call can be heard by all of God's sheep

We often over-complicate the word vocation. It seems like a fancy term for people who are called to a *special* ministry. You might think of someone who is ordained in a dog-collar. However, our passages challenge that notion today to simplify the idea of vocation to 'God speaks to you' or 'God calls you'. In verses 16 and 17, Jesus challenges the preconceived notion that there are only some who hear God's call as he opens the sheep pen up to others. Any calling from God starts like it does in John's gospel as Jesus calls Philip and Nathaniel by simply

asking them to 'follow me'. If you have heard that call from Christ to 'follow him' then you have received a call from God.

If Christ the shepherd speaks to all of us the next question is what is he asking of us? We are reminded that we can trust the voice of the shepherd as God wants to call us into the place we were meant to be. That might not always be the most comfortable of places, although I am sure there will be times of green pastures and still waters. There will inevitably be times where you need to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, trusting in the voice of the shepherd leading you. However, when we do follow God's call we are able to be part of his transforming of the darkness of the world to bring light into those dark places.

God's call shapes and changes us

Our final reading from Acts evidences God transforming power. Peter and John are before the High priest having healed the paralytic man who was at the Beautiful gate in the temple. It is so important to remember that these are the same disciples who ran away at Gethsemane and denied Jesus in the courts of the very same High Priest just weeks earlier. As they have entered into God's call the transformation is complete as filled by the Holy Spirit they stand and declare the Good News of who Jesus is and what he has done. Notice in verse 13 that it is their courage and their eloquent despite their lack of schooling which astonishes people. How apt, that they are commended for their courage at this moment when it had deserted them at the time of Jesus' trial. Alongside this, they have been transformed despite their lack of education to be tools of God as he transforms the world.

When we listen and hear what God is calling us into, we are transformed. Sometimes we require the *courage* to enter into that call. God promises his Holy Spirit to fill us and give us confidence, we simply need to hear and be willing to follow. Sometimes we doubt that we have the *competence* to be able to do what God is asking of us. Again, God reminds us that we are not defined by what we achieve but that we are willing to be obedient to the call.

So, this Vocations' Sunday, are you listening because God is calling you? What is God speaking us to do or be in His name? Do you trust the call of the shepherd that He will give you the courage and competency you need to follow that call?