



Sunday Reflection

Season of Easter

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 25 April 2021

Easter 4

Let us worship God in pureness of heart, ready to present our minds and bodies
as a living sacrifice.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down
his life for the sheep."** John 10:11

An Illustration to set the scene

Sheep will often stray and get lost, making them vulnerable to predators, of which there were many in first-century Palestine.

Jesus' mission on earth was about bringing strays of the human variety back to the fold, encouraging them to change their ways and forgiving them.

With sheep, though, if the straying process became a habit, action had to be taken for the stray's own good.

In Jesus' time there was a practice among shepherds, still happening today, whereby shepherds would do something with a persistently stray lamb that at first seems cruel but was intended to save its life.

They would take the lamb and deliberately break one of its legs so that the shepherd had to carry it until the leg was healed.

By doing this, the lamb became so attached to the shepherd that it never strayed again.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Is it reasonable to imagine a hired hand bothering to take personal responsibility for a stray sheep, or more than one, at no small inconvenience to themselves?

Almost certainly not!

As Jesus makes very clear in the Gospel passage, a hired hand has no investment in the sheep, they are there only for the wage; Of what consequence is it if the sheep falls prey to a wolf, a bear or a lion? The hired hand's priority would be to ensure their own safety and run away.

In sharp contrast Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has a personal relationship with the sheep.

By day and by night, he is watchful on their behalf.

He knows them all by name and, in turn, is known by them. Nor is this relationship just with the current flock.

Jesus has a potential relationship with the sheep yet to be brought into the flock – not just the Gentiles in surrounding areas but people of all nations.

This is Jesus' Great Commission to his disciples at the end of Matthew's Gospel.

Above all, this relationship is sacrificial and the sacrifice is knowingly and willingly offered by Jesus. The act of laying down his life is mentioned repeatedly as the central theme of these verses.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd primarily because of his willingness to die, once and for all, on the cross at Calvary.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

How can we, God's children, respond to this sacrificial act? How can we mirror the divine love that has been shown to us and, as closely as is humanly possible, replicate it?

Clearly the answer must be linked to what we do and what we don't do in our lives.

Very pertinent is Jesus' instruction to his disciples, in Matthew 25, that *"just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"*.

We are, though, all very different and Jesus calls each of his "sheep" individually. Most Christians are called to quite ordinary work for God and it matters not whether that work is high-low-profile, up front or behind the scenes.

The great Baptist missionary to India, William Carey, when describing his work for God, said merely, *"I plod."*

And that, surely, is how many of us lead our Christian lives. In our very different ways we *"plod"* – **faithfully, unspectacularly, but with loving and generous purpose.**

It was the American writer Henry David Thoreau who said this: *"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away."*

To understand this, we should think of those sheep in the sheepfold, hearing their different names being called, each call having its own tone, pitch, volume and urgency.

To the sheep, the calls are immediately recognisable and they respond.

To us, though, the call may come as a still, small voice, which we can choose to notice or ignore.

May our prayer be that God's call to us comes clearly and unmistakably through the din of modern living, and that we respond as Jesus wills us to.

May we always try harder with everything we do for Jesus, our Good Shepherd, but above all may we, like the sheep, draw closer.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” John 10:11

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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