



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

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



For Sunday 8 May 2022

Easter 4

Let us worship God our Father, who is one with our Lord Jesus Christ, as we hear Jesus challenged to give a definitive answer to the request, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly". His response is not what his questioners expect or want to hear.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me."

John 10:25

An Illustration to set the scene

Often, at the start of an episode of a television drama series, there is a brief recap of events that have gone before to remind us what's been happening – and it might be helpful today to do something like that to set the scene for our Gospel reading.

Jesus has been talking about the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep, identifying himself, in two of his "I Am" sayings, as the gate for the sheep and the good shepherd.

He described the characteristics of a good shepherd which enable his sheep to feel safe, secure and cared for, and therefore able to live without anxiety or fear.

The Pharisees to whom Jesus is talking would know that in their scriptures the relationship between shepherd and sheep is used as an image to describe the relationship between a king and the people.

They would be familiar with Ezekiel 34, in which God claims to be a true shepherd to those who have been neglected, led astray and abused by false shepherds.

God also says that David will be the shepherd, or king, of Israel – and of course it was expected that the promised messiah would be a descendant of David.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

The setting for today's reading is the *Festival of Dedication*, or Hanukkah, when the liberation and rededication of the Temple about a hundred and fifty years earlier is remembered and celebrated.

These events took place following a revolution led by Judas Maccabeus against occupying forces, which resulted in Judas becoming king over Israel and founding a dynasty, even though he was not a descendant of David.

It's during this festival that Jesus talks about being the good shepherd in a land once again occupied by a foreign power, this time the Roman Empire.

So we can perhaps understand why there's a sense of expectation, tension and suspicion in Jerusalem, as people speculate about Jesus, a descendant of King David, being the messiah who would overthrow the Roman imposters and regain freedom for the people of Israel.

It's in this context that the religious leaders put pressure on Jesus to declare categorically whether or not he is the messiah. It's not a question with a straightforward answer.

He certainly isn't the sort of messiah they have in mind and they don't seem to have understood him at all.

So Jesus says that he has already answered them both in what he has been saying and in the things he has done.

He goes back to using the image of a good shepherd whose sheep know him, recognise his voice, trust him and follow him.

The problem is that these religious leaders don't recognise the voice of the Good Shepherd, the true Messiah, and they don't understand his language.

This presents a major barrier to honest communication between them and Jesus and in the final section of this chapter they try to stone Jesus and seek to arrest him on charges of blasphemy.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

The Pharisees, and people who thought as they did, had a clear picture in their minds of what the longed-for messiah would be like and what he would do.

His voice and the language he used would be about revolution, victory over enemies, power and a triumphant kingship established in this world.

Jesus uses a different language – one of peace and reconciliation, justice tempered with mercy, healing and forgiveness.

If Jesus is the Good Shepherd then his sheep are those who look for tenderness, care, protection and a love that will look for them when they're lost.

They recognise that Jesus offers them these things and so they follow him, trusting that he will look after them in a way that no one else can.

They recognise that he offers them eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Our Gospel reading today invites us to think about the voices and the languages that we ourselves understand and use.

Around us are many voices speaking the language of violence, extremism, hatred, jealousy, prejudice and pride.

Surely our calling is to use the language of love to reach out to God's lost sheep, who are longing for the care and protection that only our Good Shepherd can provide.

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John 10:25

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 some folk are not able to meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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