



Sunday Reflection

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



For Sunday 21 April 2024

Easter 4

**The Rector will preach at St John's
& St Margaret's:-**

God spreads a table before us and offers us bread and wine to feed and sustain us on the pilgrimage of our lives. Let us give thanks and praise to our loving Lord, whose goodness and mercy surround us all the days of our lives.

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

An illustration to set the scene

In the unlikely event that a sheep decides to read the Bible, she might be looking for stories about sheep.

Well, she would find plenty of stories featuring both sheep and shepherds.

Our sheep might learn a lot about life as a sheep and how it doesn't always end well.

In Palestine, from long before the time of Jesus' ministry, sheep were raised for their milk and meat, wool and hide.

They were also used in religious sacrifices – not good news for a literate sheep to read!

Our sheep would also learn that the relationship between shepherd and sheep was used as an analogy for the relationship between the people of Israel and their leaders who would be shepherds to them.

In the book of Ezekiel our sheep would find a God who condemns the practices of the shepherds who are just hired hands.

But she would also find that that same God, the Good Shepherd, looks after his flock to protect them, feed them and heal their wounds.

Sheep might not understand the words of the Bible but they know when they are being led by a negligent and uncaring shepherd.

They also sense when a leader, or shepherd, is good, caring and protective and they will follow that Good Shepherd knowing they will be safe with him.

Today's Gospel teaching

In today's Gospel reading the Pharisees who, as the religious leaders of the people of Israel, might be considered the shepherds of that flock, listen to Jesus in angry disbelief.

They are shocked into furious silence when he says, **“I am the Good Shepherd,”** and, **“The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”**

They are so angry because **“I am”** is the name of God, as revealed to Moses from the flames of the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-15), along with the slightly longer version, **“I am who I am”**.

It’s a sacred name, which should not be spoken aloud by anyone.

But Jesus does speak it and, what’s more, he is saying that it is his name.

Then he refers to himself as the Good Shepherd.

The Pharisees are again angered by that name, which is a reminder of the condemnation by God, recorded by the prophet Ezekiel, of the **“bad”** shepherds, who mistreat and even kill the sheep they ought to be protecting.

Believing Jesus is calling himself by God’s name, they understand that he is referring to them as hired hands and thieves.

Jesus says that he will lay down his life for his sheep; that he will bring into his flock sheep who are on the outside and that he lays down his life by his own choice.

It’s not surprising that in the next verse that follows our reading we are told, **“Again the Jews were divided because of these words.”**

How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?

What does all this mean for us today?

We hear various voices coming at us from all directions.

There are the positive, helpful, encouraging voices that we listen to and trust.

They are the voices that help us feel protected and safe.

But there are other voices that we recognise as manipulative, bullying or untruthful.

And if we do hear and recognise such harmful voices we can call upon Jesus to protect us from harm, to open our ears and minds to voices of love.

Maybe sometimes we need to remind ourselves or need reassurance that the voice of the Good Shepherd is speaking to us and loving us.

Like the people John was writing to in our second reading, each one of us is loved and valued by God, whose Son was ready to lay down his life for us.

In turn, we too are called to lay down our lives for our Lord Jesus and for one another.

It may be that we are not called upon to die for others, but we are called to live a welcoming life, to be available and ready to serve others, as Jesus loves and serves us.

Our time, our knowledge, our skills, our hospitality, encouragement and understanding: all these things we can lay down for the benefit of others and in serving them we are serving Christ, whose life was dedicated to serving, healing and understanding all those he met.

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

www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk