

3rd May 2020 - Sermon: Reading John 10 v 1-10

One of the things that we need to remember is that when we come to the Bible we do so with certain lenses. We have the lenses of faith, gender, sexuality, social class, status, race. All this has an impact on the way we read something. Clearly we read these texts with the lenses of our current traumatic but passing situation. The powerful read a text in a very different way to the powerless. That is why we need to study the bible together and why also we need to find ways to hear what people are really saying about a text not just the loudest voices. So the question for each of us is.-what are our lenses as we come to this text? Or any text. To be curious about ourselves for surely that is where the magic happens. When God opens our eyes to see ourselves and then to see God at work in us in our humble broken humanity.

Like Jesus.

Jesus is a man who by the time these texts were written had been put to death by the Romans. He had been raised to life by God. These are the stories that have grown out of a faith community in a specific oppressed time.

The Roman powerful leaders always presented themselves as being the good shepherds. They declared that people were the beneficiaries of secure borders. The Emperor saves the people from economic harm and is a benefactor who offers abundant food. Which is interesting in view of the fact that we think that 70- 80% of the population did not have a secure food supply. So to be protected from theft with the image of green pasture was a poignant promise but not a reality.

The Roman Empire promised to bring wholeness and wellness to the whole of society but its structures actually brought sickness and poverty to the majority of the people. Jesus is an opponent of imperial rule. In John's gospel he is put to death because he opposes Roman rule. He cares for all the people.

When you think of Jesus as the Good Shepherd what do you think of? From the Old Testament and the New it's a well known and well worn picture of the shepherd as the leader of the people.

It's a metaphor. Which is great for some and a pain for others. If you like your truth dissected laid out then metaphor is not good news because its messy and layered and has the potential to be not what we were expecting. Often a metaphor is not the usual so we could not hear it. But then John's gospel always is the world of metaphor. If you like your truth story shaped then this is bliss.

So Good shepherd. -Looking after, caring. Sacrificing your own life for the sake of the sheep. Looking out the lost. OK. All tenderness and lovely. But also sheering. Getting rid of the ticks. Moving when they would rather stop. Ensuring that the sheep do not wander where they want to wander too. Enclosing. Being shepherded is not the same as being looked after as an indulged pet. Sheep are working creatures who have a purpose. And if Jesus is the shepherd and we are the sheep life is not then about sitting on a cushion being fed titbits.

The shepherd in Palestine was a man who carried a bag with his food in, a sling, a staff which was a wooden club, and a rod like a shepherd's crook. Traditionally – in the time of Jesus sheep in Palestine were not kept for meat but wool. The sheep were with the shepherd a long time. There was a closeness which is not how it is for us in our farming methods. They did get to recognise the voice of the shepherd because they were with him so long. Jesus speaks of the shepherd who wants the best for the sheep. The sheep follow the shepherd because they hear his voice. First question- whose voice are we listening to? There is a lot of false stuff out there. Be cautious. Check it out with the things that are fundamental to our lives. We are not to be people taken in by passing thoughts and fancies. Secondly we cannot hear unless we listen. We cannot hear unless we are tuned in. How do we tune in? Simple we stop and we listen regularly. You hear a song. Never heard that song before. But you know who it is by because you know their voice. We recognise their cadences.

The other thing that is worth highlighting is that the passage makes it clear that people did not always and easily know what Jesus was saying. It requires effort. Thinking. Imagining. Studying.

Jesus as the good shepherd comes to offer life in all its fullness. What does life in all its fullness look like? I'm guessing it's a lot different from what it did 6 weeks ago. I'm dreaming of pubs, hugs, hanging out with you good people and classes in the gym. – oh yes and seeing my family! Your vision will be different from mine. But treats are not what life is made of. We have to be careful not to be spending this time living in treat land. Equally spending this time dreaming of what will be and the thought that we will slot back into exactly how things were as though nothing had changed.

If the shepherd comes to look after the sheep then surely the shepherd is the model for us as his people. What does that look like for you? What has been the purpose of your life up to this point? What new methods can we now use to fulfil that same purpose? One of the jobs of the shepherd was keeping the sheep safe. When they are close to the shepherd's home the sheep go into communal large sheepfolds. They have a strong door for which the guardian of the door has the one key. But when they are out in the fields and long way from the village then the sheep fold is open to the elements and there is not a door. Literally the shepherd is across the gap and they, the sheep, are the door. Different methods for different situations. The aim is to keep the sheep safe. What has been our aim up till now? How will we fulfil that in this season?

Part of it is being a faithful follower of Jesus. Giving our lives in a cause that is bigger than us. How can we do that? Answer in new ways. Or maybe for some going back to the old fashioned ways. –write that letter, use that telephone.

Preached by Lesley Charlton to be shown on 3.5.20 to whoever is watching –whenever they are watching! Or reading....