

Easter 4 – 3rd May 2009

Sermon Text: John 10:11-18

Theme: *“Love one another, as I have loved you”*

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The common theme for this Sunday is Jesus who serves as our Good Shepherd. It matters that Jesus is our Good Shepherd and not just one of the hired help. Jesus' service of us changes everything for us and for those we are called to serve.

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

I AM the Good Shepherd

In the gospel reading for today, Jesus reveals himself as the good shepherd. The contrast between himself as the good shepherd and one who is hired is made very clear. Because he is the Good Shepherd, Jesus is prepared to lay down his life for the sheep. He is prepared to chase after the sheep who wanders off, tracking it down until he can put it on his shoulders and return it to the flock. The good shepherd will fend off the wolves and the robbers who try to steal the sheep from the safety of the flock. Why does the good shepherd do these things? Why is the good shepherd prepared to lay down his life for the sheep? Because they belong to him. They are his own – they don't belong to anyone else and no one else can touch them.

The contrast is then between Jesus as the good shepherd and the hired hand. The hired hand doesn't care about the sheep so when the robber leaps the fence or when the wolves strike, the hired hand looks after themselves only. When the sheep are left alone, it means they are scattered and they become easy pickings for whoever wants to have a go at them.

Consider what this means in the context of a Christian community. If there is a hired hand who is leading the congregation, at the first sign of trouble, they will cut and run. The members of the congregation are then vulnerable to any of the perils in our modern society. Perhaps there might be a sense of initial freedom. “Hey this is great. I'm not being held accountable anymore so I can do what I want.” But before long people will realise there is no such thing as true freedom. Luther said we are always bound. We are either slaves to our sinful desire or we are slaves to Christ. Which would you rather be bound to?

So what's the difference between Jesus who is the good shepherd and one who is a hired hand? Well Jesus is the one who cares for the sheep. Because they belong to him, he's going to watch over them, he is responsible for them. The hired hand on the other hand doesn't own the sheep. He doesn't care for them but instead he cares for himself. That's why he's getting paid. To do a job, to earn some money which means he can look after himself.

Jesus holds together the flock

After Jesus has described the difference between himself as the good shepherd and the hired hand, he then describes the relationship between himself and the flock. “I know my own and my own know me.” And this knowing is as close as the knowing relationship between Jesus and his Heavenly Father. That is how close you are to Christ, as close as he is to God. Is it any wonder you are heirs of the Father?

As close as Jesus is to you who are part of his flock, the compassionate Jesus is also aware there are other sheep who belong to him but they are not yet part of this flock. So Jesus will work to bring them into the fold as well. They too will listen to his voice and be brought into the one flock.

Always there is unity with Jesus Christ. There is the perfect unity between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is lived out as Jesus calls his sheep into the one flock. We enact this unity when we share in the one body of Christ our Lord, Jesus our Good Shepherd. And because there is unity with one shepherd we should consider who is our congregation's shepherd? Is it Pastor Mathew Ker's? Is it my church or is it my ministry? Did the ministry of this congregation belong to Pastor Ross or Pastor Ian or any of the pastors who have served here in Cairns? Does the ministry of this congregation belong to you? Does the success or failure of this congregation depend on what you do or don't do? Some would say "yes". Unless you adopt this or that programme, unless you engage in this ministry or that ministry, the congregation will die.

Who is the Good Shepherd who watches over this flock. There is only one Good Shepherd and that is Jesus Christ. *He is the Good Shepherd and it is his flock and it is his ministry alone.* This means those with the big egos, whether they are pastors or parishioners, should leave them at the door. We call this confession. And what follows is God's absolution. The ministry of this congregation belongs to Christ and he will lead us and we will shine his light into this community.

We are to love one another

If the ministry, the work of this congregation belongs to Jesus, what are we to do? Well we are bound to Jesus which means we are his servants. You are already safely in the flock and this means you are already kept safe by the Good Shepherd. Jesus will protect you from the wolves who threaten to divide you or from the robbers who would jump the fence and steal you away. This means you have the strength and the ability to serve other people, both those who are already in the flock and those who belong to Jesus but who are not yet part of his one flock.

John writes about Jesus laying down his life and this is then our example. We too are called to lay down our lives. But there is a big difference. Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins. He did that work once and his salvation was for all people. The life we are to lay down is the "Me first" attitude. Because Jesus has died on the cross for you, you are now free to set aside your desire to be first all the time. Instead of being like the hired hand who was thinking about themselves and how they could earn money to buy the things they wanted, you are now one of the sheep who has everything provided for you. Jesus as the good shepherd has led you beside still waters. He has prepared a table before you, even in the presence of your enemies, Jesus is giving you the things you need.

Jesus did all this because he loves you and this means we are now free to love one another. Look around at those seated with you. If you have already had all of your needs looked after, surely you are free to love those around you which means putting them first. Instead of thinking first about yourself, trust that others are thinking about you because Jesus has loved them. You are cared for so you can care for others.

Over the past few days, we had 21 principals of Lutheran schools from all over Queensland visit the Far North. They had a tour around Peace Lutheran College; they visited Wujal Wujal and joined in a service of Holy Communion where a young boy was added to the flock through holy baptism; they visited the community of Hope Vale and heard the stories of that place. These principals and the communities who shared their time with them, lived out what it means to belong to the one flock who is served by Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

Jesus is the good shepherd who has laid down his life for you. He loves you and asks nothing more than you believe in him and the salvation he has already one for you. Jesus keeps you safe within the one flock and it is always him who serves you now. He does this through the service that comes from loving one another.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.