

2021-04-25 – Rev Esma Collins-Marks

John 10: 11-18

A shepherd was looking after his sheep one day on the side of a deserted road, when suddenly a brand-new Porsche screeches to a halt. The driver, a man dressed in an Armani suit, Ray-Ban sunglasses, Rolex watch, and a Pierre Cardin tie, gets out and asks the shepherd: "If I can tell you how many sheep you have, will you give me one of them?" The shepherd looks at the young man, and then looks at the large flock of grazing sheep and replies: "Okay." The young man parks the car, connects his laptop to his mobile, logs onto the Internet, scans the ground using his GPS, opens a database with 60 Excel tables, and then prints out a 150-page report on his high-tech mini-printer. He then turns to the shepherd and says, "You have exactly 1,586 sheep here." Rather surprised the shepherd replies, "That's correct, you can have your sheep." The young man takes an animal and puts it in the back of his Porsche. Just as the man is about to drive off, the shepherd asks him: "If I guess your profession, will you return my animal to me?" The young man answers, "Yes, why not?" The shepherd says, "You are an IT consultant." "How did you know?" asks the young man. "Very simple," answers the shepherd. "Firstly, you came here without being called. Secondly, you charged me a fee to tell me something I already knew, and Thirdly, you don't understand anything about my business. (PAUSE). Now please can I have my dog back?"

We might think looking after sheep is a simple task but it isn't. Looking after sheep is a highly specialised job. It takes a good Shepherd years to learn his trade – and it is often passed on from father to son.

I would like to offer you some reflections on Jesus's words in our Gospel reading this morning when he said: "I am the Good Shepherd." What a strange metaphor to use? But I think very appropriate in many ways. Firstly, because we have some "not too

flattering” similarities to sheep. Secondly, Jesus’s love and concern for us is similar to that of a shepherd for his sheep and thirdly because I think the Church should be like the sheepfold.

When I look at society today, I can see three characteristics of sheep that I see in people around us – and in myself too! Sheep follow the crowd and don’t think of the consequences. I watched a football match some years ago. One or two people started throwing burning rockets onto the field because they were incensed with the referee disallowing a goal. Suddenly the field was ablaze with rockets being fired by fans – so much that the match had to be abandoned. With reckless abandon, the fans followed the crowd and cost their team the match!

Sheep can be pretty stubborn. There is a leader and there is a tail-ender. When a sheep trusts someone, it follows him/her without thinking. I think this was sadly shown in 1978 in the Jonestown tragedy, when about 900 followers of the cult leader Jim Jones committed suicide in Jonestown, Guyana – simply on the say so of their leader Jim Jones, whom, they trusted. It is therefore essential that we find the Good Shepherd who will care for us - his sheep – not exploit us.

So, what characteristics of the Shepherd can we see in Jesus.

There are some wonderful characteristics that first century Jewish Shepherds had. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep and cares for them individually. We see that well illustrated in the parable of the Lost Sheep. A shepherd had 100 sheep and found that one of them was missing. What did he do? Did he write that sheep off - as a slight economic loss? No he left the other 99 safely grazing and went off to find the one that was lost. And we read that when he found it he came home rejoicing!

Shepherds protect their sheep. David was a Shepherd before he became King. It was as a shepherd that he killed Goliath. He said this to King Saul as he went out to battle with Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

The Good Shepherd laid down His life for those whom He calls out of darkness into everlasting light. He is the Shepherd of Israel, but His flock includes those out of every nation, throughout all of time, who respond to His call. He is calling us by name. Amen