



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus said, 'I am the Good Shepherd'

St John 10. 11-18

Sunday 21 April

There are few endearing images of Jesus as that of him as a shepherd, as we see in the picture above. Perhaps the best-known and most-loved psalm is 23: The Lord is my shepherd. The idea of Jesus shepherding his sheep is one which comforts and reassures, but behind which lies a wealth of symbolism and meaning. This saying of Jesus, as recorded by St John in his gospel is just one of seven, all of which make statements about who and what Jesus is.

Firstly, we need to consider the significance of what is meant by the **good** shepherd. The prophet Ezekiel tells us that God will remove all the 'bad' shepherds and replace them with his own. Shepherds were on the fringe of Jewish society. They couldn't attend synagogue easily. They were out in the fields away from towns and villages. They were servants who were primarily concerned with themselves and not the sheep. And they weren't above replacing a lost sheep from their flock with someone else's just so the numbers were right. All the more amazing then, that they were the first witnesses to Christ's birth...

- What makes a shepherd 'good' in your opinion?
- How do you regard biblical shepherds?
- Is there such a thing as a 'bad' shepherd – what makes one so?
- Is the image of a shepherd a helpful one in a urban/suburban context – if not, what else?
- Who are the good shepherds today?

St John doesn't just record Jesus' saying that he was the Good Shepherd, but goes on to evidence how Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and also his purpose as the Good Shepherd. Shepherds look after their flocks, but were they actually to own them, then they would take even greater care; they'd be looking after their own. All living creatures respond to care, unless they have been subjected to much cruelty.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, because his flock is his own, cares for his sheep, and his sheep respond to that care. In the days of the old covenants, God was very specific about who he 'owned' – who were his people. Under the new covenant in Jesus, all may belong to God's flock and be cared for by the Good Shepherd. Indeed, the Good Shepherd actually goes out searching for those who are lost or abandoned so that all may belong too one flock under one shepherd.

- What is your reaction to Jesus' searching out the lost and the abandoned – do you feel jealous?
- Should Jesus, Christians, be proactive?
- If sheep belong to 'another fold', what is the nature of that fold?
- How do the sheep come to know and trust the Good Shepherd?
- Where can we find him?

Jesus states that he has his Father's love, because of his willingness to be the Good Shepherd, laying down his life to take it up again. The good shepherd is the one who puts his sheep first, regardless of the cost to himself, as we have experienced through the Easter story. In order that we might have safe pasture, Jesus died and rose again. That 'pasture' is with him and his Father in heaven. However, all the offer is there, it is up to the individual to accept it or not, to belong to Christ or to choose to go elsewhere. Maybe we need to think whether we are going to be silly sheep and try look after ourselves, or sheep that recognise, and welcome, the Good Shepherd.