

On Wednesday, as a family we went to Mum and Dad's in Mulgrave. Where we enjoyed some rest, some company, lasagna and lemon delicious pudding, and a game of 500. It is still a home to me, beneath the gum trees. Just down the hill from the local Good Shepherd parish. With its 3m shepherds crook raised high above the roof of the church building. Pointing the world to Jesus Christ. The great Shepherd of our souls. Our refuge and strength in trouble. Here, in the Anglican Parish of Saint Peter's in Brighton, our home, among the trees. Where we are reminded who we are, and whose we are. After the storm, in which we were locked out of celebrating our Patronal Festival a year ago.

Our scripture reading this morning fits like a glove, our own time and place. What God is doing among us, in our own time and place.

'For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the nation, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land; and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.'

The Christian church is the new Israel. Christian worship, the new mountain heights.

It is here that we find green pasture.

It is to here that we find refuge from the storms of life.

It is here that we are found. It is here that we lie down. It is here that we are brought back, from all the places to which we have strayed. It is here that our injuries are bound up. It is here that we find strength.

It is here that our souls are fed. By Jesus Christ himself, the bishop of our souls. The Good Shepherd of the flock.

When Jesus says to Peter, 'Do you love me?' and commands him to, 'Feed my sheep' what does he mean? Does he mean simply that Jesus is here to feed the church with himself, through the bread and the wine? Or is he going further? Is he going deeper? The clue lies in the conclusion to our Old Testament reading this morning. 'But the fat and the strong I will destroy, says the Lord. I will feed them with justice, says the Lord.'

In the New Testament, it is Jesus Christ himself, the Lord and the Head of the Christian Church, who is the Good Shepherd. Here, to seek and to save us, when we are lost. Here, to defend us, against attack by predators.

When the evil of this world attacked Jesus, Peter abandoned Jesus. Abandoning Jesus, Peter had abandoned God. Peter broke the law of God. The greatest and first commandment. Which saw Peter in need of being made just.

A making just is done, through forgiveness.

A forgiveness that is administered, by God. 'Do you love me, more than these?' Jesus is bringing Peter back to the greatest and first commandment. 'I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods but me.' Jesus is bringing Peter back to his original calling to follow Jesus. To leave behind him 'these' fishing nets, the things of this world, to follow Jesus, and the concern for the kingdom of God, alone.

The problem is, Peter had gone back to doing 'these' things, to follow the idols of this world. Abandoned Jesus. Abandoned God.

Jesus confronts Peter directly, in love. Peter recommits himself to Jesus. Comes back to God. Jesus forgives Peter. The justice of God is done.

The just shall live by faith. Said the Apostle.

I will feed them with justice. Says the Lord.

And I will feed them with justice, through Peter. The first bishop of the church. He is there to administer justice. So that the people are fed with justice.

By Jesus himself, the Lord and Head of the church, the shepherd of our souls. Through Peter.

While Paul was alive, such was his authority in the early church, he was able to administer justice in the church.

'Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message', the Apostle said. 'At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.'

With the death of the Apostle, Jesus appointed Peter, to be the first bishop of the church. To administer justice. That the Christian church may flourish. That the Christian church may have new life.

But there can be no flourishing, no new life, where the justice of God is not done. Where the love of Jesus is abandoned. When the love of God is abandoned. Where other things are worshipped and served. Where there is hate, which is murder. Where there is false testimony being borne against neighbour. Where there is a coveting of that which belongs to another.

But the fat and the strong I will destroy, says the Lord. I will feed them with justice.

A justice in which all the baptised have a share. In that by the Spirit our whole lives are given up, to the justice of God within Christian community, and the flourishing of the Christian community.

Said the prophet Micah 'What does the Lord require of you? But to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.'

Said the prophet Isaiah:

Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?

Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

[Or] is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.