

Saint Peter's

Sunday 30th April 2023

Ps 23, 1 Peter 2:1-10, John 10:1-10

'I am the Good Shepherd'

Since Easter the Gospels have proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus, and His Presence at the Eucharist, as our Lord and God, and as our host. Today's Gospel proclaims what is he doing in our midst.

Its like throwing dust into the wind. The wind blows where it will, and we cannot see it. But throw some dust into it, and all is revealed.

Three points this morning:

Presence

Provision

Protection

Having focused on His presence in recent weeks, today we will focus on His provision and protection.

'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly.'

First, we turn to Jesus' provision.

The Lord Jesus is our shepherd, therefore we shall not be in want. Because Jesus is with us, as our shepherd, we shall not be in want. For he is with us, to fulfil our every need.

He makes us rest in the green pastures of Brighton Beach, and of Saint Peter's Brighton Beach. He leads us by the still waters of Port Phillip Bay, and of the Christian church. He restores and refreshes our souls. Jesus is here to bring us fulness of life. 'I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly' Jesus says to us this morning.

Jesus Provides for us. Bringing us fulness of life. Meeting our need for sustenance.

Like sheep, we are weak, vulnerable, we have needs. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. In whom we trust. The meaning of faith is trust. In faith we entrust our lives to Jesus, on him we depend, for all of the nourishment, and sustenance we need. Jesus is here, Jesus is present, to provide for us.

Now, we turn to Jesus' protection.

Yea thou we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we are not afraid, for you are with us, your rod and your staff they comfort us. You prepare a table for us in the presence of our enemies, and our

cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus is Present, to Protect and to Provide for us. Jesus is here, so that we may live in peace and prosperity.

‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.’

Jesus is here to give us the Peace that we need. So that, when we are threatened, He is Here to protect us. He is with us, standing between us and our enemies and aggressors. He is Present, to ward off destruction and exploitation.

Walter Brueggemann, is a world leading biblical scholar. In his commentary on today’s Gospel, which he wrote in collaboration with Charles Cousar, Beverley Gavenda and James Newsome, Brueggemann shares the meaning of Jesus protection of His flock, the church, in our Gospel today:

‘In [John chapter] 10:1-6 a contrast is established between thieves and bandits, on the one hand, who secretly try to gain control of the flock, and the rightful shepherd, on the other hand. Since the passage is loosely connected to its context, the identification of a precise historical group of thieves and bandits is hard to come by. They are, rather, characterised by their actions – an individual or group who [if

you will pardon his pun] attempt to “fleece” the flock - who seek to manipulate the sheep for personal gain. When they are later described as coming to steal, kill, and destroy [in verse 10], their intentions are in the interest of acquisition. The flock seems perpetually an easy target for exploitation.’

In today’s Gospel Jesus speaks, on the one hand, about the thieves and bandits who appear, but whom the sheep, the church, do not heed. And he speaks, on the other hand, about the salvation, the provision, and the protection, that Jesus provides. Jesus has come not as the thief to kill the sheep and leave the flock in disarray, as in the bandits and the thieves. Jesus has come to bring us peace, and prosperity. Jesus has come to bring us life, in all of its fulness.

Today’s image of shepherd and sheep is a good one. We all need Jesus to provide our every human need. We all need Jesus to protect us from our enemies. And, perhaps most importantly of all, we all need Jesus, to blow our sins away. We all need Jesus, to set us free.

‘I am the good Shepherd’, Jesus says. I lay down my life for my sheep.’

Today’s image of sheep and shepherd is both adequate and powerful, because the shepherd is always primary in the relationship. The sheep are dependent on the shepherd. The sheep derive from the shepherd.

The sheep need the shepherd, for the nourishment, and the security they need. For the forgiveness that we need. For the relationship with God, that is broken by sin, and that is restored in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Our relationship with Jesus is one of intimacy and trust, harmony and well being. As sheep we have come to know the voice of our Good shepherd, and have come to heed it gladly. Jesus knows each one of our names, and values us, each for itself. The outcome of this relationship of trust is that we will want for nothing. For we are redeemed, restored, related to God, the source of life. Our creator.

Unlike the thief, Jesus the Good Shepherd has a close and personal relationship with us. We belong to him. We are in a relationship with him, borne of experience. Often, painful experience. It is often, through painful experience, that we come to know him, for ourselves. In our souls.

‘I am the Good Shepherd,’ Jesus says. ‘I know my sheep, and my sheep know me.’

Back to Brueggemann,

‘Strikingly, the close relationship between shepherd and sheep is not so much encouraged as assumed. The possibility is not even

entertained that the sheep, in moments of perplexity or uncertainty, might confuse the voices and follow the thieves and bandits rather than the shepherd, a phenomenon that according to church history has often occurred. Instead, the sheep are familiar with the shepherd's voice. The positive statement is meant to reassure. Amid the welter of conflicting appeals, the sheep are able to recognise and follow the single voice that can be trusted.'

In the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, it is the image of the shepherd, that dominates the scene. The Good Shepherd, is God himself. The Creator of heaven and earth. We all like sheep had gone astray, all taken our own way, but the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. He is here, to forgive us. He is here, to give us a new beginning. A fresh start.

For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that you may have life, and have it abundantly.'

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,

 a cornerstone chosen and precious,

and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

This honor, then, is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected

 has become the very head of the corner,”

and

“A stone that makes them stumble

 and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,

 but now you are God's people;

once you had not received mercy,

 but now you have received mercy.

For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Rev'd Jonathan Chamberlain

Vicar