



Jesus said 'I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.'

I want you to take out the picture of Jesus the Good Shepherd which you received in your order of service this morning.

There are three things I want you to notice in this picture today.

Firstly, the sheep.

I want you to imagine yourself as the sheep in this picture. How does it feel? To be held like that? In the arms of Jesus. Safe. Secure. Loved.

Jesus knows us, and we know him, not in the way of modern scientific observation, but in the way of love. Jesus loves us, and we

love him, not as an idea, but personally. In the form of a relationship. In which, over time, through spending time with him, we come to know him, who already knows us. We are like the woman at the well, who, upon meeting Jesus for the first time, went out and told everyone else in the city about him, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He can't be the Messiah can he?'

On Wednesday morning, before the funeral of my cousin on Friday, while prayerfully waiting upon the Lord for a message for those who would be gathering there, on my way out of my local coffee shops, I noticed something there that I had not noticed before. It had always been there, I just had not noticed it before. For some reason, on this particular day, I found I could not get it out of my mind. It was a sign advertising Peter's Dixie Cup Vanilla Ice Cream. It was then that I remembered the last words I heard my cousin Andrea say, 'I had been craving a Peter's Dixie Cup since my treatment (for cancer) commenced 6 weeks ago and finally bought one'.

Jesus is the Messiah. The Son of God. The Good Shepherd. He knows his own. And his own know him. He knows us, and we know him, personally. Intimately. He knew us, when we were there in our mother's womb. He knows our every hair on our head. He knows everything that we have ever done. He knows every sparrow who falls from the sky.

And he can know us in that way, as the one who, as the only one who, knows God the Father in that way. He knows the Father, and the Father knows him, personally. Intimately. He knew him, before the world began. He knew him, when he lived on earth. He knows him now, eternally.

And this is the second thing I want you to notice in this picture today. Just who it is whose arms you are invited to rest. The arms of God himself.

In Jesus Christ, God himself is with us. In Jesus Christ, we are with God. This is the meaning of Jesus words in our Gospel this morning:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

In relationship with God, there is nothing in this world that can separate us from God. Our relationship with God is stronger, even than death. In relationship with God, we have the promise of eternal life. Of a life without end, beyond death. The promise of eternal life, in a world, beyond this vale of tears. That is the world, of the kingdom of God himself. Where God will wipe away every tear from

every eye, where death will be no more, where mourning and crying and pain are no more. When all of these things, will have passed away. When God, will have made all things new.

Which brings me to the third and final thing I want you to notice about our picture this morning.

The wound on Jesus hand.

‘The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.’

This is there to remind us that the one who is with us, as the one who was raised for us, is the one who died for us, so that we might live forever. Because, by his death, once for all, God has taken away the sin that separates us from the love of God. The offence, the consequences, the guilt. He has borne.

We all like sheep had gone astray.

All taken our own way

But the Lord laid on him

The injustice of us all.

The Lord be with you.

Be still, my soul, the Lord is on your side.

Taken away. Dealt with. We are free to have a relationship, with the one who seeks a relationship with us.

And whose name, is Mercy.

For the God revealed in Jesus Christ, that the God who is with us, is a merciful God. Who in the cross of His only Son, has removed whatever it may be, that once separated us from God.

And he has done this, not because of our merit, but his. The merit of his great love for the world. Who makes his rain to fall and his sun to shine on all, the just and the unjust. He has done this, out of his great love for us. And for the whole world

Like Peter, upon seeing the glory of Jesus, I said to him 'Lord, go away from me, I am not worthy of you'. Until I saw the wound in his side. Which tells us that the one who was raised for us, is the one who died for us. There to forgive all that I have done. There to remove, every little thing that separates us from the love of God. It is done. It is finished. It is taken away. God has dealt . Not by what we have done. But by what he has done for us.

In the famous words of John,

'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fulness we have all received, grace upon grace. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.'

Removing there, once and for all, anything and everything that separates us

And the final thing I want you to notice about the picture today is the wound on Jesus hand.

Where

freely available to us. In Jesus Christ. In a relationship, more powerful than death. 'In my Father's house there are many dwelling places,'

I am going through death, to prepare a place for you, beyond death. An inheritance, of eternal life. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am'. As he has now done for Andrea.

An eternal life , His Son. eternal life is now freely available to each and to all. In Jesus Christ. Through a relationship, more powerful than death.

His swirling Spirit binding Father and Son together in love forever. In an eternal embrace. In an eternal dance.

the Father, through His Son, two loving persons, joined together by . Two loving hearts bound together by the Holy Spirit

Two love hearts, joined together by the swirl of the Holy Spirit, now come into the world, as one of us. A human being.

'I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.'

There are three things I want you to notice in this picture today.

Firstly, the sheep.

I want you to imagine yourself as the sheep in this picture. How does it feel? To be held like that? In the arms of Jesus. Safe. Secure. Loved.

Which brings

Imagine that.

Jesus is the Messa

As just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father

Jesus does not mean knowledge. It is relational knowledge. It is the knowledge of a relationship

Here the word 'know' does not mean, the knowledge of something through observation, inquiry or observation. Here the word know means the knowledge of someone through deep, personal, intimate, relationship. And not just anyone. Jesus is not 'Hail fellow, well met.' Jesus is the divine mystery of salvation. The mediator of salvation. Relationship with him, is relationship with God. A relationship, more powerful, even than death.

If God is two love hearts, Father and Son, with a loving swirl embracing them, the Spirit, with the coming of Jesus, the love of God has now come into the world. Is with us. To bring us safely home. To bring us back, into the loving arms, of God himself, through Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. To remind us, who we are, and whose we are.

But now thus says the Lord;

He who created you, O Jacob

He who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I am with you;

I have called you by name, you are mine

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

When you walk through fire you shall not be burned;

And the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

I am with you.
You are precious in my sight;
And honoured, and I love you.

Driving home from the café on Wednesday, I heard a song I hadn't heard before, by Paul Zark.

In the calm and in the storm
When it seems I'm all alone
It's your hand I find to hold.
In each hour of unrest
When it seems I've nothing left
You speak peace in every breath.
For you are always, always with me
In the morning
In the evening
When I'm waking
When I'm sleeping
When I'm arriving
When I'm leaving
You will have me
In your keeping.
Even from my mother's womb
Never hidden from your view
I was always known to you.
For you are always, always with me

When I fade away in death
You will catch my final breath
You will take me to my rest
For you are always, always with me

I can make it through the night
When I'm clinging to your light
You will make the darkness bright
For you are always, always with me.

One of the most common mistakes that we can make in our relationship with God in Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is to think that we are the ones who are there to seek and to save the lost. Whenever we feel lost. Whenever we feel sad, or lonely, or afraid. When in fact the opposite is true. Whenever we find ourselves lost, sad, lonely, or afraid, Jesus is the one, to come after us. To seek and to save us, whenever we stray from the fold. Whenever we become lost, or afraid. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Who knows us personally, intimately, lovingly. Who is there, to hold us, to hear us, and to heal us.

By his wounds, the mark of which we can see on his hand. There to remind us,

That we all have strayed like sheep
All taken our own way
But the Lord laid on him
The ways of us all.

He was pierced for our sadness
His suffering, has won our peace
And by his wounds, we are healed.

Amen.

725 words

For we all, like sheep, had gone astray, all taking our own way. But the Lord laid on him the sadness of us all. And by his stripes, we are healed.

Not us. Relax. Take a load off. Simply, receive him. His love. His embrace. His invitation. His welcome.

At a time when we have placed ourselves at the centre, it is natural for us to imagine that it is down to us. That, because we are alone, it is we who must make it happen.

In our sadness it is natural for us to get clingy with God. As if everything depends on us.

Reflecting this week on today's image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in addition to the peace and the joy that comes from the feeling of security, of safety, beyond the feeling of joy and peace, at being loved so much, that God would give up his only Son for me – notice the wound in Jesus hand – of being in the arms of One, much stronger than myself – is the feeling of relief, comfort and joy, at the realisation that I am not the subject

In the arms of God. Was

'I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.'

Jesus knows us, and we know him, not through observation, inquiry or information, but through relationship with him. In which, not us, but he, is at the centre. In which he, and not us, is the one who is there, establishing and maintaining that relationship. It is his relationship. It is his initiative. It is his responsibility, to be with us, to be present to us, to lead us, through, the many challenges we face in the world. Not least of which is death.

Jesus is not distant from us, he is intimate with us. Jesus is not an idea, he is a person. Jesus is not impersonal, but personal. Attentive. Present. Here.

Embracing us. Holding us. Here with us. Our bridge over our troubled waters. Today. Every day. God with us. Our Good Shepherd. Knowing us, better than we know ourselves. Nearer to us, than our very breath. Covering over our sadness. Carrying us. Completing us. Leading us, into greener pastures. The greener pastures, of the kingdom of God. Where Andrea now rests secure. In the presence of her family and friends. Her suffering, and her death, now behind her.

Like Andrea, all human beings suffer. We all suffer, in many and varied ways. Often known only to God. But our perception of the various sufferings of human life in this world, is determined by hope for a future that will overcome all suffering, for good. The kingdom of God, the new Jerusalem, is the final resting place of God's eternal presence to us, and to all people. The place where God will wipe away every tear from every eye, where death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things, that is, this world, of suffering and death, will have passed away. And God himself, will make all things new. That is the Christian hope. And that hope is universal. All things in God. And God in all things. Eternally.

When suffering is considered in itself to be damaging and crippling our life, it is meaningless and in many cases disgraceful. But it receives a significance when it becomes the occasion of longing for the future salvation that transcends this perishable existence. The meaning of suffering is the salvation that God will bring about. The meaning of Jesus, is an anticipation of the future salvation, the eternal life, that God has preordained for his human creatures. And the meaning of suffering is to prepare us for the salvation that God has in store for us, and for his world.

When finally we come, like Andrea, to the fulfilment of our life in this world. The completion of our life in this world. The taking up of our life in this world, into eternal life. The eternal life, of God himself.

All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

And already now, God is with us. In Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd. By his life of humble obedience to God, and in his resurrection to a new, a glorious, a never before seen, or since, eternal life, Jesus is the way, he has shown us the way, to everlasting life. He is with us, to comfort us, and lead us home.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.. I am going through death to eternal life, to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”