

Sermon on John Chapter 14: 1-14  
'Jesus: The Way, The Truth & The Light'  
Chester Lord – St Peter's, Brighton Beach

- May I speak in the name of God: father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our most recent online, and thankfully more streamlined, Census in Australia is a far cry from those that I experienced back in South Africa. My memory of Census gathering in South Africa was quite different. A man would come to the door and my mom or dad would spend what seemed like a very long time filling out forms with him. One particular aspect always stood out for me however. We were essentially all reduced to numbers, clinical statistics and raw data for a future spreadsheet or graph. "Never mind the names", he would say. "I just need the numbers." This always struck me, even as a youngster, as being incredibly impersonal.

But, of course, we did have names. We did have our own personalities and our family was more than mere numbers on a form or in a chart. Yet even today, we are so often allocated to a demographic grouping of numbers or cold hard stats. Our identities, our transactions and even our communications.

Fortunately, Christianity is not like this. Jesus knows each and everyone one of us by our names, just like a shepherd knows each of the sheep in his flock. Our individuality is important to God through his son Jesus, as he declares in our Gospel reading this morning to be "the way, the truth and the life."

Last week, we heard about Jesus the Good Shepherd as a reference to God's intimate knowledge of us all. A good shepherd looks after his flock and knows his sheep. Sheep seek the security of the flock and follow the shepherd. When several flocks are grazing together in a pasture, they are still able to distinguish the unique voice of their own shepherd and follow his tone, inflection or whistle. Sheep require a leader, not because they are necessarily stupid, but because they know that they can't go it alone. They need someone to lead and guide them along their way and keep them safe from danger.

Jesus is our shepherd, our way, our truth and our life. People who truly belong to God listen to and believe in the words of Jesus. We need to distinguish his voice from all the other voices we hear clamouring for our attention in our daily lives. And there are many these days.

It involves the faithful staying in the presence of, and exposure to, Jesus' voice. The loudest voices we hear are not always the wisest ones. Jesus invites us to attune our hearing to the sound of his voice so that even if it is faintly detected amidst the cacophony, we can lift our heads, turn our gaze, and walk towards it.

More than ever, there are certain voices that entice us away from the Gospel. We are told that is impossible to be happy unless we are ultra-wealthy. Impossible to be fulfilled unless we have at least 100 'friends' on Facebook. Impossible to be free unless we answer to no one.

And in this crowded marketplace the voice of Jesus keeps saying the very same thing he's been saying for over two thousand years. Happiness is found in sharing our love and time with the needy, in being faithful, present and attentive in all our relationships, and in surrendering our freedom to the service of God's kingdom of justice and peace.

The problem is not that Jesus should shout more loudly. It is that, at critical moments in our lives, when we have to make crucial decisions, we often close our ears or only listen selectively. Rather Jesus' quiet and gentle voice and way is one of calm, love, compassion, peace, forgiveness and mercy.

When we are trying to find and navigate your way through the journey of life, we need some help in finding the right way to go. A place for our troubled hearts to find refuge. Each day we face many difficult decisions and it is sometimes hard to know which way to turn. Some people use their feelings to make decisions. They say, "I'm going to do this, because it just feels like the right thing to do." However, our feelings may change from day to day, and just because we feel good about something, doesn't mean that it is the right thing to do.

In the language of today's Gospel, the centre is the Father's house and there are many dwelling places in this house. In the Father's house there is a dwelling place for every troubled heart. It is not necessarily talking about the afterlife. Rather, it is referring to the dwelling places as the ways God's life intersects with our own: mercy and forgiveness, justice, generosity, compassion, healing, love, beauty, wisdom, hope, courage, joy, intimacy. These are the dwelling places for troubled hearts, places of re-centring. Every time we live by adopting these divine attributes in our way of being: with our words, or by our actions...we regain our centre, restore balance, and take up residence in the Father's house.

As a gate-keeper, Jesus provides both protection and freedom. He gives us helpful boundaries and keeps potential perils at bay. With Jesus as our shepherd and our way, no one is lost. Some need washing, some need feeding and others need mending. But no one is lost. We can trust him more than we can trust the noise of the world around us. Jesus the Shepherd is our Emanuel: God with us. In an age when we are so electronically "connected", but not always present, Christ is truly with us. Christ always goes before us. He leads us. He promises to always stay with us and is indeed "the way, the truth and the life."

AMEN