

**ST PAUL'S (RONDEBOSCH)  
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2021**

**READINGS: ACTS 4:5-12// PSALM 23// 1JOHN 3:16-24// JOHN 10:11-18**

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*Lord, you are a God of compassion and of all comfort. May Your Word and the truth of your tender care for your flock comfort your people. AMEN*

A distinctive characteristic of John's gospel is Jesus' seven "I am" statements

1. I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never go thirsty"
2. I am the light of the world he who follows me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.
3. I am the gate, if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pastures
4. I am the resurrection and the life, no one comes to the Father , but through me
5. I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me"
6. "I am the true vine and my Father the vinedresser

And this morning in our Gospel reading Jesus says

**"I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me"  
A Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep"**

What picture or image comes to mind when you hear or read these words.

I think some images of Jesus the Good Shepherd and most of the pictures and images portrays Jesus in the long robe, immaculate beard standing in the middle of a beautiful field or stunning valley, shepherd's crook in one hand, little lamb in the other, being looked on by adoring and loving sheep and just the hint of a loving smile on the lips of the Saviour.

*Some of the earliest images of Jesus found in churches and tombs were not portrayals of Jesus on the cross, or the infant in the manger. Rather, they picture Jesus as the gentle shepherd. And what may be one of the earliest paintings of all is of a very young Jesus, dressed in a short white tunic, who has draped a lamb over his shoulders.*

Our Gospel reading presents to us our Lord who is our great Shepherd. However gentle and tender the text presents it, John is giving us two contrasting pictures. This is not just about the Shepherd and the Sheep living in harmony, this is also about the hired hand and the wolves that are desperately looking for a succulent meal.

*When Jesus spoke of shepherds and sheep he was speaking to people who had everyday experiences with lambs, sheep, goats and kids. I think it is fair to say that some of us do not have much experience with shepherds and sheep. So here is some background on the life of a Judean Shepherd*  
*He rises early and leads his sheep out calling them by name (John 10:4). Arrives at the pasture where he watches his sheep feed. If any stray he will go after them (Ezekiel 34:12, Luke 15:4). He supplies them with water, either a stream or from a well (Psalm 23:2). In the evening he leads them back into the pen. He makes sure that none are missing, by passing them “under the rod” as they enter into the pen (Leviticus 27:32, Ezekiel 20:37). Finally he lies at entrance and protects the sheep at night.*

In John 10 v 12 we read ***“The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep, so when he sees the wolf coming he abandons the sheep and runs away”***

So who were the hired men that Jesus referred to?

The setting of this Gospel reading is set in the context of confrontation with the authority. Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, the religious leaders who were always seeking to catch him out. When Jesus talks about the Good shepherd and the hired hands he is using an image from the Old Testament Scripture (Ezekiel 34) to undermine their authority as religious leaders of the people of Israel. In Ezekiel 34 we read that the bad shepherds:

- ***Slaughtered the fat sheep, dressed in fine woolen garments, but did not feed the flock. Did not care for the sick, diseased, or broken sheep. Did not seek the lost or scattered sheep. Dominated the flock with force.***

The Pharisees, Sadducees and the religious leaders saw themselves as the spiritual guides of Israel, the spiritual protectors of the people, they are the only ones who knows the law and the Scriptures -----but in this text Jesus is accusing them of spiritual corruption.

Jesus' accusation is that the hired men, does the shepherd's job for personal gain, and not for the sake of the sheep. And, when the hired hand sees a threat to the flock, he runs away leaving the sheep defenseless.

**Jesus is making a very clear point here. The Pharisees are the shepherds and the hired hands that have left the sheep down and now HE is the Good Shepherd who will love the flock sacrificially.**

So in the midst of this disturbing metaphor is an image of a beautiful relationship that exists between Good Shepherd and his sheep.

Jesus gives three reasons for being a good shepherd:

In John 10v 14 we read *“I know my sheep and they know me.”*

That's a picture of relationship, of time spent together, of trust, of care, of interest in those under his watch, and of personal knowledge of them. This is not a cold professionalism. This is an intimate understanding of which sheep likes to run ahead, of which lambs are the most playful, of which ewes the most attentive, of which rams the most defensive. This is a shepherd who knows his sheep, calls their names, counts their heads when they enter and leave the sheepfold. This is not just a job; this is the shepherd's life because these are his sheep. And he loves them.

**My friends Jesus know us by name. He knows everything of us our dark secrets; our strong points, our weak points, our hurt, our frustrations, our failures, your struggles, your challenges, (your problems that you have with your abusive or addictive husband, son or daughter or wife// the problems you have at school// unemployment// financial difficulties//sickness ) but he still loves you. WE BELONG TO HIM//SHEPHERD. Furthermore be encouraged by the wonderful Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd**

In v 15 we read *“I lay down my life for the sheep.”*

This quality of the shepherd really has a double meaning. Jesus, in this same chapter, refers to himself as the sheep gate (John 10v 7). When the sheep were out in the pastures, the custom was for the shepherd to usher them into the sheepfold each night. The sheepfold was typically a stacked stone compound, high enough for keep out predators, but without a door. The shepherd then lay down in the opening to the sheepfold, and literally became the sheep gate. Nothing went in or came out unless it came by the shepherd first. But then, of course, Jesus really does lay down his life for the sheep. We have before us today the symbols of that sacrifice. And, Jesus makes it clear here in

John 10 that he is laying down his life of his own accord — he’s choosing to give his life for the sheep, and that is why the Father loves him so.

**Friends do we really know how much Jesus loves us, so much so that he laid down his life for us? (So whatever you’re past is // you can turn your life around, God loves you he has forgiven you) EACH ONE BELONG TO HIM//SHEPHERD.**

In v 16 we read *“I have other sheep that are not from the sheep pen. I must bring them, too.”* And also in 1 John 3v 16 we read *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters”*

Finally, the good shepherd is concerned for all the sheep, for sheep in general, not just the ones in his sheepfold.

The Pharisees and the religious leaders thought they are the only one entitled for God’s salvation however, Jesus was saying that He was sent by God the Father to save the sheep—the Jews—but that He was also sent to save the other sheep—the Gentiles, the non-Jews. God’s kingdom was going to be one big flock—one gathering of God’s people, both Jew and Gentile, all of God’s people together.

Jesus is telling us here He’s got other sheep, He’s got other people that He wants to bring into His kingdom, and those people might not be the people we’d expect to be in God’s Church. Jesus is saying “there are some unlikely sheep — the unclean, the poor, the diseased, the lame, the weak, the oppressed — these are my sheep, too.” Not just the upright, the righteous, the powerful, the ones like us.

## **CONCLUSION**

This is the challenge for us this morning how do we as St Paul’s Church reach out to the other sheep in our communities?

- Those sheep who used to belong to our Parish but who don’t come to Church anymore especially those who did not come back since we have experienced the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Those sheep in our parish who are lonely, the aged, depressed, the sick, the mentally and physically disabled.
- These past week we experienced this terrible Table Mountain fire how did we reach out to those sheep who were affected by the fire? (\*school)
- It is Jesus laying down a challenge to us this morning How can we be gracious enough to move out of our comfort zones and move over in the fold to make space and welcome others to the fold (the new sheep)