

## **Sermon 22 April**

### **The Good Shepherd**

#### **John 10:11-18**

Jesus said, 'I am the Good Shepherd.' It is a wonderful image. He was quoting from the well-known twenty-third psalm, 'The Lord is my shepherd', and from the prophet Ezekiel where the Lord God says, 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down.'

So here Jesus was identifying himself with God his Father, and saying that together they care for each one of us, just as a good shepherd cares for every single one of his sheep.

In Palestine the grazing of sheep takes place, not on lush pastures but invariably high up on ridges where grass is scarce. So the shepherd led the sheep from one place to another in search of pasture. No fences meant no protection. Wild animals, not to mention thieves, were a constant threat. The safety of the sheep was the concern of the shepherd. He lived with them, spent his days and nights with them, fought off wild animals with either a sling shot, his staff, or even his bare hands. In other words, the shepherd was prepared to put his life on the line for his sheep. I am sure you can see why Jesus referred to himself as the Good Shepherd. It was his willingness to put his life on the line for us all that makes this analogy so relevant.

The issue of sacrifice lies at the heart of the Easter story. That is the ultimate sacrifice. Not many are called upon to make a sacrifice of that nature, but down through the ages there are those who have done just that.

Some of you might remember the story of the Air Florida flight that crashed into the icy waters of the Potomac River just after taking off from Washington airport in 1982. There were only six survivors, all in the water clinging to a fragment of the plane's tail section. Only minutes were available for a rescue before the survivors would freeze to death in the water, so there was no time to send a boat. There was only one small helicopter, which could handle just one person at a time, hovering over the survivors, lowering a lifeline and flotation ring, waiting till the person was holding tight, and then dashing to the shore for safety.

Each time the helicopter returned and lowered its line, one of the survivors, a middle-aged, balding man with a great moustache, would grab hold of the flotation ring and pass it to one of the others with him in the water. When at last the five had been rescued and the helicopter returned for him, the man was gone. Overcome by the cold, he had slipped quietly to his death in the dark freezing waters.

We ask ourselves what could possibly prepare a person to respond so instinctively with such greatness of heart? How to live the resurrection is an ongoing challenge for all of us. It doesn't mean we have to literally give our lives for others, but it does mean figuratively we should do so. What does that mean? I think simply to be prepared to make sacrifices for the benefit of others, to live our lives in such a way that we bring blessings to others. For me, that about sums it up. If we can do that, then I believe we do justice to Christ's resurrection and to the intent of the Christian gospel.

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