

Sermon 10 October 2021 The Good Shepherd (Lockdown)

John 10:11-18

I thought it would be appropriate to talk about Jesus the Good Shepherd this morning. Right now, as people are feeling under pressure and stress levels are on the rise, we need a good shepherd to lead us through these anxious times. We also need the role model of a good shepherd because hopefully we ourselves might be able to fulfill that role in support of others.

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.'* Ezekiel 34:15.

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

(Show painting)

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 that analogy so relevant.

Last week I talked about being prepared to make sacrifices for one another is something that good friends do, and right now, we need good friends. We are building on that theme today. A good shepherd is prepared to make sacrifices, even the ultimate sacrifice.

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 the Washington airport in 1982. There were six survivors, all in the water clinging to a fragment of the aircraft's tail section. The water was freezing and time was of the essence if the survivors weren't going to freeze to death. There was only one small helicopter available, 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. 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 repond so instinctively with such greatness of heart? That is more, far more, than generosity of spirit. That is carrying Jesus' edict of 'the greatest love is shown when one lays down one's life for one's friends,' which we referred to last week, to the absolute degree. We can be inspired by such noble sacrifices, but thankfully it doesn't mean we will probably be called upon 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.

If we can do that, then I believe we do justice to the intent of the Christian gospel.