

Easter 4, 26/4/2015,

John 10:11-18

I wonder how many times you have heard a sermon on Jesus, the Good Shepherd?

This story is about a shepherd, thieves and robbers and sheep, not just the 'in group' of a particular breed, but including others of a very different breed.

The pastoral life was very real in society at the time of Jesus and even before that time shepherds and sheep were used to describe the relationship of God with his people, for example, Psalm 23 "The Lord is my shepherd".

Good leaders were referred to as "shepherds of the people".

David in the Old Testament is referred to in this way but when he had Uriah killed so that he could marry Uriah's wife, Nathan the prophet exposed David as a bad shepherd.

The point that Jesus makes is that the good, true shepherd is not in it for his own profit or benefit.

On the contrary, the real test for the good, true shepherd is when he is confronted with a choice.

A predator comes, a lion, a bear or a wolf.

You can tell the difference between the true shepherd and the false one by what they do.

The false shepherd places his own welfare before his reputation.

The true shepherd shows who he is by being prepared to die for the sheep.

Jesus shows that his violent death is not just a possibility: it is his vocation.

This realisation comes as a result to Jesus' knowledge of the Father and his Father's knowing him as his Son.

Jesus knows that the nature of God's love is always self-giving; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Jesus also knows that God's love is universal and therefore the good shepherd must be concerned also for the 'other sheep ...not of this fold' who also will hear his voice and be brought together into one flock.

This is in contrast to the religious leaders of the day who wanted to preserve the pure group and to cast out anyone whom they considered

to be not pure including the sick, the blind, the lepers, the mentally ill, the Samaritans and above all, the Gentiles who made up the rest of the world.

As the crucifixion and death draws nearer, Jesus makes it clear that he lays down his life willingly out of sheer love for his people and this love flows from the heart of God.

This story of Jesus, the Good Shepherd affirms some of our beliefs and experiences.

First, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

This is God's infinite love for God's people.

This is God's love that we experience day by day.

Secondly, God's infinite love is not just for us, but for all people.

This is part of the challenge to us to show God's love to all people, the outcasts, the refugees, the unloved by other humans, the homeless, the hungry, those without shelter, the addicted, the disabled, the mentally ill and the lonely, older person around the corner.

This is the challenge to all involved in the pastoral care of God's people.

It takes time and effort to know God's people with whom we have contact; to know them individually as God knows us, and caring for them as Christ died for us.

It may even demand the ultimate sacrifice.

This is the challenge for archbishops, bishops, priests, deacons, the leaders of the various organizations within a parish or diocese, the leader of a bible study, a prayer group and so on, along with the person who cares for the lonely, older person around the corner.