**John 10:22-30. Jesus the Good Shepherd**

If you’ve ever had anything to do with sheep, you’ll know that they are singularly stubborn and brainless creatures. In this passage from John, Jesus uses the metaphor of a shepherd and his sheep to respond to a demand from the Jews about his identity and in so doing, describes the relationship he has with his followers.

We mustn’t get too literal, comparing ourselves to stubborn and brainless sheep, thereby becoming offended. Rather we should focus on the shepherd, and what it means for us to be in his care.

As we look at this passage, we’ll find that there are three amazing blessings that come from Jesus being our shepherd.

To gain a full understanding of Jesus words though, it helps to look briefly at the background of the story.

In today’s Gospel reading, we find Jesus in the temple again with people pressing in all around him. It’s the last scene in Jesus' public ministry and it takes place at what was called the Feast of Dedication

For the Jews, this was a festival of great hope, because it marked the last national deliverance they had experienced. It also celebrated the restoration and purification of the temple, particularly the altar. In 178 BC, the temple had been desecrated by a Greek general called Antiochus Epiphanes and it was a time of great rejoicing when the temple and altar were finally repaired and the temple rededicated.

So this was always a feast where spirits were high. People hoped for new beginnings. There was an air of expectation. The people often thought, "This would be such a good time for God's divine deliverer come and set his people free!"

John tells us Jesus was walking through ‘Solomon’s Portico (or colonnade)’ and he would have taught as he walked. The Jews were surrounding Him and plying him with questions. Not so much in hostility - it seems they were more focused on asking Jesus the central, burning question of their existence, *"If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly"* (v24). In Jesus, they were faced with a man they could neither disregard nor explain, and they wanted to settle the question of His identity once and for all.

It is as Jesus responds to this demand of the Jews, that we learn what it means to know Jesus as our Shepherd, and as I said earlier, find in this relationship, three amazing blessings.

The first is this:

1. **We belong to Jesus.**

Most Christians, at some time or another, find themselves pricked by doubts. Questions sometimes surface: Am I a proper Christian? Does God really care about me? Can God really forgive me for that sin? Our assurance can sometimes become rocked by our cirucmstances.

*(v 26) “Jesus said (to the Jews), ‘You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me”*

Those of us who are here this morning are here because Jesus, our Shepherd, has called us, and we have responded to him. We are here, because the Father has opened our eyes to the truth of his Son. We have seen that yes, he is the Son of God. Yes, we have sinned and fallen short of his standard. He has enabled us to repent and ask forgiveness, and has enabled us to surrender our lives to Jesus as our King. We are only able to do these things as God opens our eyes and grants us understanding of his truth. So the very fact that we are here this morning as believers, testifies to the fact that we belong to Jesus!

The Jews on the other hand, were not Jesus’ sheep, so they did not hear, or recognise his voice.

In response to their demand to tell them plainly if he was the Messiah, Jesus said, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me;”

Over and over again Jesus had urged the Jewish leaders to let his works, done in His Father's name, bear witness to who He was. But their minds were closed. Even the raising of Lazarus from the dead made no difference - they were not his sheep, so it was impossible for them to hear His voice and follow Him.

Jesus can only be known as the Messiah by spiritual insight, not by verbal or human proofs.

Have you ever found yourself in a discussion with someone about Christianity who just won’t listen? It doesn’t matter what you say in answer to their questions, they just have more arguments to shoot you down with. Their minds are closed to the truth. You could give the clearest, most brilliant exposition of the Christian message, and it would still just wash over them. Understanding Christian truth is a gift from God. While he uses our efforts, a person’s response is not dependent on our eloquence or learning. It is dependent upon God opening a person’s eyes to his truth.

I’m meeting regularly at the moment with someone who has spent two years in a cult. Humanly speaking, it’s an uphill battle. It is really hard to combat the relentless input of the cult. But a couple of weeks ago, we began to look at Jesus and his claims to be God. I watched in fascination & thanksgiving as God opened this person’s eyes to the truth. It wasn’t articulate arguments, or even the verses from the Bible we were looking at that made this person understand who Jesus was – it was simply God turning the light on in this person’s heart!

So the first blessing in Jesus being our Shepherd one of belonging. If we have heard Jesus voice and have responded to him – we know we belong to him. He knows us, and we follow him.

1. **We have eternal life**

The second amazing blessing is found in v28 “I give them eternal life and they will never perish”

The older we get, the more we find death in our face. Most of us here this morning will have lost someone dear to us - a parent, a spouse, a sibling, a child. With each loss, the reality of death is brought home to us and we are increasingly faced with our own mortality.

From the dawn of time, humans have sought to be immortal. It’s a thread that runs through our stories, our literature, & our mythology. And we Christians have it! Christians are immortal! And that immortality doesn’t wait till we die to kick in. We are immortal now, in Christ.

Jesus says triumphantly – “I give (my followers) eternal life, and they will never perish.” Think about that! We will never perish! We will live forever!

We have proof death has been conquered. Jesus rose from the grave. And not only that – Jesus promised that his followers that they too would raise the dead.

Last week we explored Peter’s encounter with the risen Christ. You’ll remember that Peter denied Jesus three times, and three times, Jesus commissioned Peter to serve him and the church. We know how transformational that encounter was because in the reading today from Acts, who do we have raising a sick woman from the dead – but Peter himself!That’s so encouraging, isn’t it? Peter blew it big time – and yet here he is, performing in the power of the Spirit, one of the greatest miracles we could possibly imagine.

The second blessing we have in Jesus being our Shepherd is that he has conquered death, and he promises his followers, “I give them eternal life and they will never perish.”

1. **We are safe**

The third amazing blessing we find in this passage for Jesus’ followers is found in v28 &29: “No one will snatch them out of my hand.

What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.”

Jesus' sheep hear His voice and follow Him. He shared His abundant and eternal life with them so they will never perish. And no enemy, however strong he may seem, can snatch any of the sheep from Jesus' hand, because His Father, who has given them to Jesus, is greater than all enemies.

I think a fear many parents have is that their children will not be part of God’s kingdom. So many of us bring up our children in the faith, only to see them walk away from it as they grow up. We are sad that they don’t come to church, that our grandchildren don’t come to church, and we wonder where they are with God.

This is one of the passages of Scripture that gives us great comfort. Jesus promises that those who belong to him cannot be wrenched from his grasp. They are his. They have been given to him by his Father, and they are safe.

We can entrust our children to God, knowing that they are safe in his hands. If they appear to be off the rails for a time, then we need to pray for them. We should never underestimate the power of the praying parent of grandparent. Remember what James tell us? “The prayers of a righteous person (that is, a person who belongs to the Good Shepherd) are powerful & effective.”

Let me finish with an encouraging story. Jay’s Uncle Dick was a chiropractor, and we were quite close to him. I came off a horse in my early 20s damaging my neck, and for years, I went to see Dick at his rooms in Guildford for treatment. I remember so often I would lie on his table, nose down the hole, and we’d talk about Christianity. He’d been brought up as a Catholic, attended a Catholic boarding school, but had thrown in his faith as he grew up. He fought in two wars and saw a lot of tragedy, and couldn’t see any evidence of a loving God. He was quite a sceptic. He came to live with us when I was rector of Taralga, and during those years, we saw an amazing transformation. Dick revisited his faith – and at the age of 83, he recommitted his life to God. Just before we lost him at age 86, he’d bought a new study Bible, and was working through Norman Geisler’s tome ‘Systematic Theology”.

Dick belonged to God – and though he went through some difficult times, and had many decades apart from him, God never let him go.

Next time we think of Jesus as our Shepherd, may we be reminded of the grace that is ours through knowing his voice, through the gift of eternal life, and through being held safe in his care.

Let us pray.