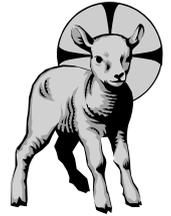




Enjoying God: Life in All its Fullness

(passages from John's Gospel)

Summer 2017



John 10:1-11 Care

(sermons: June 25)

Introduction

Although there are comparisons with shepherds, sheep and sheep-pens all the way through John 10, Jesus uses the image in different ways. There isn't just one parable but a series of four slightly different parables. Sometimes each part of the comparison can be identified but sometimes there is just one main point and the other characters are part of the background (e.g. in verses 1-6 you can identify the shepherd, the robbers and the sheep – but not the watchman in verse 3.)

There are several passages in the Old Testament where political or religious rulers are compared to shepherds: shepherds are leaders and protectors of their sheep in a potentially hostile environment, rather than those who chivy them from behind. The prophets condemn the leaders of Israel for exploiting or neglecting their people/sheep. God promises to rescue the people himself and to provide new shepherds/rulers for them (Jeremiah 23:1-4; Isaiah 40:10-11). The most extended use of the shepherd/sheep picture is in Ezekiel 34 (see especially verses 1-2, 10-11, 23 in box below), where rescue is promised both from God himself and from a second David: looking back, we can see how Jesus fulfils both these roles. When Jesus described himself as 'the good shepherd', he was claiming to fulfil these prophecies of God rescuing his people, and implying that the political and religious leaders of his time were failing to act as God wanted them to.

John 10:1-6 The Voice of the Shepherd

- v.1 *I tell you the truth* – Jesus uses this phrase several times in John's Gospel to emphasize what he is saying and its link to what has gone before: in this case, the reactions of people in chapter 9: the blind man who heard his voice, and the Pharisees who tried to shut him out.
 - v.1 *the sheep pen* – a walled enclosure with a single entrance; in this part of the chapter, there seem to be sheep from several different flocks in the same pen, with a watchman guarding the entrance, allowing each shepherd to enter to call out their own sheep from those in the pen.
 - v.1 *thief and a robber* – the words have similar meanings but 'robber' suggests a more violent person; it is the word used for Barabbas in John 18:40, sometimes translated 'murderer' or 'rebel', as well as for the temple-traders in Matthew 21:13. Here and in v.8 Jesus may be condemning both those who make a profit from religion and those who manipulate people for a violent political cause.
 - v.3 *calls his own sheep by name and leads them out* – apparently, shepherds in that area still do this
1. Who are the different characters in this Parable? There is a contrast between entering by the gate and climbing in some other way: how did this apply to Jesus and the religious leaders of his time? What does it say about the 'sheep' for whom we may have some care or responsibility? Does it apply to our motives for being involved in Christian work, or our methods? See 2 Corinthians 4:1-2.
 2. In what ways does Jesus 'call his own sheep by name'? How in practice can we 'listen to his voice'? How do we recognize whether Christian leaders are saying things that we should follow?

John 10:7-11 The Gate for the Sheep

- v.7 *I am the gate for the sheep – the picture changes slightly to a smaller sheep-pen with only one shepherd's flock inside. There is no longer a wooden gate, or a gatekeeper, but the shepherd himself lies across the entrance to the sheep-pen, making himself the 'gate'.*
- v.8 *all who ever came before me – the religious and political leaders (including revolutionaries) in the years immediately before Jesus came; this is a sweeping condemnation of them all as only being in leadership for what they could get out of it for themselves, in contrast to the self-sacrifice of Jesus.*
- v.9 *whoever enters through me will be saved – it is not clear whether Jesus is referring to being saved/ helped/rescued in day-to-day living (like the sheep going in and out and finding pasture) or in an eternal perspective (as John 3:17); where there are 2 possible meanings in John, he often means both.*
- v.10 *that they may have life and have it to the full – “I have come that you might have life – life in all its fullness” (GNB); “have it (life) abundantly” (RSV); “have it full to overflowing” (Tom Wright)*
- v.11 *I am the good shepherd – as opposed to the bad shepherds in the Old Testament (see Introduction)*

3. What did Jesus mean by describing himself as *'the gate for the sheep'*? What does he offer those who listen to his voice and follow him? Is there something exclusive about Jesus' claims here?
4. How can we as 'under-shepherds' follow the example of Jesus as *'the good shepherd'*? (1 Peter 5:1-4)
5. When those who are not yet Christians look at our lives, do you think that they see evidence of *'life in all its fullness'*? What might they find in our life together as a church that they don't find elsewhere? Do we come across as celebrating what is good as well as criticizing what is wrong around us? How can we put across the message of Jesus' care for us and for all the world?

Ezekiel 34:1-2, 10, 11, 23

¹ The word of the Lord came to me: ² “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ...

¹⁰ This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. ¹¹ “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them..... ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.

2 Corinthians 4:1-2

¹ Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

1 Peter 5:1-4

¹ To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away