

## Weekly Sermon

### *Fourth Sunday of Easter – John 10:1-10*

In the old Lectionary, today would have been known as Good Shepherd Sunday. I believe there is merit in still celebrating this day. I find it remarkably interesting that Jesus was a carpenter and was involved with fishermen, but he spoke so often about sheep. Those of us who have worked sheep, understand the attributes in sheep that are shared with humans. When many of us feel threatened, like sheep, we try to hide in the crowd so that we will not be seen by the people threatening us. Like us, they are prone to follow leaders even if the leaders are not necessarily appropriate to follow. When things frighten us, or when we are not sure of something, we can become very jumpy. Sheep, when for instance are going through a gate, will often jump at some imaginary thing between the gate posts. This is incredibly challenging when you are one of the people trying to count them through that gate. Most of the time there is more than one person counting and if you happen to get a different tally to the others, you will probably 'wear it' until the next time!

Jesus noted the very close and interesting relationship shepherds held with their sheep. The sheep were called by name and would respond to the shepherd's voice. It is especially important that they know the right voice to follow. In this day and age, we don't think about sheep herding in the same way as it was done in New Testament times.

Perhaps the best way we can understand it is to think of what I call poddy lambs. These poddy lambs are ones who have lost their mothers and are raised by the people on the station until they are old enough to fend for themselves. The interesting thing about them is that they really do bond, they become like the dogs or other animals and relate very closely to the people who look after them and feed them. They never lose this dependence. They actually become dangerous in the sense that, if they are put back with the rest of the flock, and you go out to muster the paddock two or three months later, there's a great possibility that the poddy lamb will run out in order to greet you and immediately trip up your horse.

Jesus talks about our need to rely to him the way these lambs rely on us. It is very important there be understanding and total dependence of the sheep on the people who have bred them and looked after them. Jesus is trying to explain to us that we have to depend on God in the way these lambs depend on the shepherd. In Jesus time, sheep had a relationship with the Shepherd and the Shepherd was with them all the time. It was a life that we find difficult to understand today. The sheep metaphor is used effectively by Jesus, to help us to understand the relationship he wants us to have with him. In our society we live with abundance, and because we do not lack anything or have little need to fight much for anything, we forget that we have a very deep dependence on God. We forget that so many people live in total poverty and fear in this world. Many people in the world will starve each day. When we do not see these things, we don't accept the danger in which some people live. Jesus walks beside us in everything that we do. He is always there and if we are prepared to accept that fact, then we can enter into conversation with him whenever we need to. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to relate to Jesus on a very very regular basis. We tend to take this for granted when we live in the society we live in. It is very easy to become complacent. I know that I struggle with this day by day - I understand that I'm not a particularly holy person, and so perhaps I find it more difficult than it really is.

Jesus doesn't just come to us; he lives with us all the time. He is available to us 24/7 and he sees all that we do and know, all that we think. He loves us very much, much more than you and I can imagine. He laid down his life that we might be saved, and I guess the only way we can begin to understand that fact, is to try to consider what we would be prepared to give up to keep the people we really love, safe. I think most of us at some stage, have felt that we would be prepared to put our lives at risk for the sake of those we love, and perhaps this is the only way we can begin to understand what Jesus felt as he approached the cross.

Shepherds in Jesus time had to put themselves between their sheep and the predators, no matter how big and scary the predators were, and this was more than just a job. This was a relationship that the Shepherd had with his sheep. Jesus has this relationship with us. Because he has given us free will, we set ourselves apart from him, which makes it extremely hard for him to fulfil the relationship that he wishes to have with us. Because of his love for us, he was prepared to suffer death on the cross. We have got to work in our own lives to feel that same love and passion for him. This will not be easy, but only in remaining aware of his love and presence with us, will we be able to start to walk that path that he walked and come into the relationship with him that he desires to have with us. Amen