

Sermon: 8 May 2022

Theme is Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Acts 9: 36-43, Rev 7: 9-17, John 10: 22-30

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*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD,*

In some places it is also known as Shepherd Sunday.

A few years back Ken and I visited, as part of the Taranaki Garden Festival 'Roebuck Farm'. Here Jodi Roebuck practised intense gardening using a relatively small space to grow a large amount of salad greens and microgreens. Some of you may remember Jodi from a Country Calendar episode where his small sheep flock was a feature. We watched Jodi as he stood on a fence post (don't try this at home 😊) and told us about his small flock. How they graze in small paddocks and are moved as soon as they have taken a set amount of the available grazing. About his sheepdog that really didn't assist. Then he clapped his hands once and all the sheep stopped what they were doing and raised their heads, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> clap those lying down stood up and at the 3<sup>rd</sup> they were ready to move. Jodi explained how he 'knew' the sheep, which ones to watch, which would lead the others and how he could call the sheep to the next pasture.

Another shepherd image is similar to this on the screen. We were travelling across some large open pasture areas of China and out of the bus windows we could see small groups of sheep grazing, each group with a shepherd attending, no dogs, and no fences.

Ask 😊

What are some of the ideas, passages and images of Shepherds that come to mind for you?

Frank Nelson in his book "I Sing Because I have a Song" reflects on "the picture is one of safety, security, warmth, comfort, full tummy, a quiet and peaceful night's sleep." But also asks if it is safe for the shepherd. The young shepherd boys in Lesotho guarding their family flock of 15-20 sheep. This could be the livelihood of a whole family. They would protect their sheep from predators and dangers, gathering them behind a stone wall at night. When cold these young shepherds would press up against the sheep for warmth – each winter several would die from the cold looking after their sheep.

Many late winters and early springs here in New Zealand see shepherds counting the toll on lambs as a result of a late snow event or icy frosts.

Listen to Joy Cowley's reflection 'On the Road' in her book Come & See (read)

Sunday along with mothers' day our church calendar celebrated Dame Julian of Norwich Julian a mystic lived from about 1342 to some-time after 1416. Here are two short quotes.

"I saw that [our Lord] is everything that we know to be good and helpful. In his love he clothes us, enfolds and embraces us: that tender love completely surrounds us, never to leave us."

[Christ's] will for us is that we should seek for and trust him, rejoice and delight in him, while he in turn strengthens and comforts us until such time as we realize it all"

**John 10: 22** sets the scene at another celebration – the Festival of the Dedication, also known as Hannuka, or sometimes the Festival of Lights. The Festival celebrates the dedication/liberation of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus after its desecration by Antiochus a king of Syria. This would have been a time for increased tension for the Judeans: a time of thanking God for having the temple back, a time also to think about kings and how they have arisen. Jesus has been teaching in the temple. And there is increasing tension between Jesus,

his followers and the Judeans. Let's not forget that the chapter ends with the attempted stoning of Jesus.

Here Jesus is walking in the portico of Solomon a public area of the temple, an area used for discussions, meetings and teaching. Jesus is surrounded by Judeans asking questions with the intent to trip him up. This feels very similar to how some of our politicians are surrounded in the corridors of parliament. Instead Cousan says 'the works that Jesus does testify to Jesus not so much because they are extraordinary (which they are) & not so much because they offer proof of his Messiahship but because they are the Father's works. We hear verse 27 "my sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me." The sheep follow because they recognise the Shepherd's voice and the Shepherd knows them. Followed by the promises of the gift of eternal life and safety in the shepherd's hand. Not just in power of Jesus but that of the Father. And the statement in verse 10 The Father and I are one"

### **Rev 7: 9-17**

Tom Wright titles the reading from Revelations 7: 9-17 as "the great Rescue". Saying the word **salvation** in verse 10 literally means **rescue**. But that often in the Old Testament the word seems to mean 'the victory through which rescue is won.

And also that the phrase 'will shelter them' in verse 15 is "literally that God will pitch his tent over them just as he pitched his tent in the midst of the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings. Judy and I have spent several New Wine festival nights in a tent as the weather did its worst, we were safe & secure, protected from the worst of the weather even though we may not have slept as well as we would have liked. We still went through the stormy night.

We are reminded that John is writing to the people, the saints who are about to suffer. Life is not going to be easy, there is suffering and persecution to come. However God knows them and will protect them. We need to know that the lamb will in turn be the Good Shepherd of John 10 and the Shepherd of Psalm 23 who leads us to the springs of living water. There is a message of hope here for us! We come to church and God knows us, where and what we have come from and what we are going out to. Because of this message of hope we can praise and worship God in the words of Verse 12 "singing, Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

### **Acts 9 : 36-43**

Peter is travelling, visiting believers and in the verses immediately prior to our reading was in Lydda about north west of Jerusalem and 10 miles southeast from Joppa. Here we see Peter saying 'Jesus the Messiah is healing you' to the paralysed Aeneas. At this time Dorcas or Tabitha grew ill and died, two men were dispatched to ask Peter to come there is no mention of Peter being asked to heal. Here as for a funeral now Tabitha has been laid out and some of her good works were available for Peter to look at. Peter prays and says "Tabitha get up!" The stories may seem small and are told in few words. Peter stays on for some time before travelling on to Caesarea. We see Peter working in the name of Jesus, the works of God are moving and the Good News is spreading. Luke reminds us the Peter is on God's business.

Bishop Ellie in Psalm 23 When we look at the life of Jesus and then the life of the saints in our church (people like Saint Francis, Mother Teresa, or Suzanne Aubert) we get a glimpse of the long line of people who come as shepherds in the name of Jesus."

In Acts our reading points out that at every part of God's story there are the ordinary people the Aeneases and Dorcases who are not ordinary to God and form the heart of the church.

I would like to finish with a prayer from the Northumbrian Community.

Amen