

John 10:7-16

When Jesus spoke to the people about the shepherd and his flock those who heard him would have easily understood what he was saying.

"I am the Gate of the Sheep."

"I am the good shepherd".

Those who first heard Jesus say this would have understood Jesus words to have a deep significance. Israel's Kings and God Himself were spoken of as "The Shepherd of Israel" in the OT.

When Janny and I were in Rome we visited the Vatican. It was all very impressive but not the kind of architecture or art I really appreciate.

As we were on our way out, in a showcase along a corridor one beautiful thing caught my eye. It was a small model in a glass case - about 35 cm long.

It was a gift to the Pope from the people of Czechoslovakia - a sculpture in solid gold -

A single shepherd walking ahead of his flock.

The sheep following behind like him the wake behind a boat. I have seen shepherds leading their flocks like this in Israel.

In first century Palestine, as the Romans called Israel, Sheep were not left to themselves in fenced areas because the grass was too sparse.

They were not left alone because of the danger from wild animals or rustlers. The shepherd cared for them leading them to places where they would find grass and protecting them from dangers.

Each night he would count them into the safety of the sheepfold. If they were far from home the sheepfold might be like a circle of dry stone wall with thorns and branches on to keep out wild animals. There would be a small gap in the wall for the sheep to pass as the shepherd counted them in. At night the shepherd would light a fire and lay down in the gap to sleep. He was the gate of the sheep to let them in and to keep them safe.

Jesus is the gate of the sheep.

**Through Him we are included in God's flock,
we come to the Lord our God.**

Each day the shepherd would call his sheep by name and lead them out to find water and pasture.

The sheep recognized the voice of the shepherd and followed him.

Shepherds did not need a sheep dog to round up the sheep because the sheep were more tame:

- The shepherd was always with them their protector and leader.
- He knew their names and what they were like as individuals, some easily frightened others more adventurous.
- They knew his voice and when he called them they would walk behind him as he led them to find new pasture and quiet pastures.

The shepherd would carry a staff and sling to protect the sheep from thieves and wild animals. Jesus came that we might enjoy an abundant life under God's care.

Jesus is the door into the sheepfold welcoming his flock in and protecting them. He is the good shepherd. As the Sheep trust and follow the shepherd we trust and follow our Lord Jesus **Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"** [11b, 15b].

Normally a shepherd might put his life at risk to protect the flock.

That is what David the shepherd boy did in protecting his sheep from wild bears, wolves and lions [1 Sam 17:34ff]. Normally a shepherd would not lay his life down. In ordinary life the death of the shepherd would mean disaster for the flock. The flock would be taken, scattered, killed.

We can understand Jesus' words more easily, than the 1st disciples would have because we know from the story of Easter that the death of Jesus the shepherd, on the cross, meant life for His flock. This discussion about the shepherds arose because Jesus had healed a man born blind. The Pharisees, who claimed to be shepherds, leaders and teachers of the flock of Israel investigated the man's healing because Jesus had done it on the Sabbath. They did not have a true love for God's people and despised the poor and sick. Jesus compares the Pharisees to thieves and robbers. Jesus is different, he does not look out for his own interests but for those of the flock.

Jesus is the good shepherd. He knows His sheep by name [9:14] and they know Him.

Our God is not an impersonal vague creator force.

He is Personal; He knows us & we can know Him.

What does it mean to Know someone?

We could ask a group "Do you know George?"

I've heard of him

I've heard a lot about Him, I've read his book.

Yes, I know George well, we are good friends.

I trust him with my life.

It is this intimate personal knowledge of experience and loving friendship which Jesus is speaking of.

"I know my sheep and my sheep know me

Just as the Father knows me and I know the

Father." V15

Amazingly our relationship with Jesus is a reflection of Jesus' own relationship with the Father.

Jesus knows each one of us and calls us by name.

We are precious to Him and he wants the best for us. He came that we could enjoy an Abundant life as children of God & life in the Kingdom of God.

The Guarani Indians of Paraguay were animists.

They did not have a suitable word to use for the name of God. The first translators put together two Guarani words "Nande" and "Jara".

Nande - means "our" in the sense of all of us.

Jara , meant owner. When we wanted to speak about the Lord our God we said "Nandejara".

The Lord our God is our owner. We belong to him. King David when he wrote Ps 100 understood this.

"It is he who has made us and we are His, we are his people and the sheep of His pasture."

The Lord, is our owner because he is our creator.

We also belong to him because He Redeemed us.

St Paul tells the Corinthians 1 Cor 6:20.

"You were bought with a price."

We know what the redemption price was.

Our Lord Jesus gave his own life that we might have life. Jesus told his disciples,

"I lay down my life for the sheep." V15b

Jesus did not look out for his own interests but for those of the flock. This is an important lesson for those of us in Christian leadership whether it is in

the church or in our families. We lay down our lives in service. I have seen that principle at work during my time at TCE as I have seen this worked out in practice, during my time in Trinity Church. I have observed the way of working of the leaders of the congregation.

One example of that is the Alpha Course - Hsiang-Ling

I want to show a brief film of a project that Janny and I have been praying for which has developed over the last six years at Sakhra, Lebanon near Tripoli on the Mediterranean coast.

Emil and Reem Bourizk had been working overseas. When they arrived home in Sakhra 6 years ago they found that the olive groves around their house were full of Syrian refugees living in tents. **Show film**

I want to mention briefly a twist in the story for those of us who might be frustrated, wondering what plans The Lord our God has for our lives; **Sylvia and Phil Good.**

PRAYER Loving shepherd, we thank you for your care for us. Give us the humility to trust in your care. Guide and protect us in all our comings and goings and give us grace to be attentive to your voice and obedient to your call. Amen

The link for the film is:

<https://churchmissionsociety.org/our-stories/syrian-refugee-pupils-get-new-school-building/>
<https://churchmissionsociety.org/our-stories/imagination-for-education/>