

Gospel of John, chapter 10, verses 1 – 11, - Good Shepherd Sunday:-

The comparison of the People of God with sheep runs through the whole of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments. There is not only a description of the sheep but also a condemnation of the unfaithful shepherds along with a prophecy of the coming “Good Shepherd” – see Ezekiel chapter 34. It is worth reading on to the end of verse 31.

John chapter 10, verses 1 – 5:- Note that these verses continue the ‘discussion’ with the Pharisees in chapter 9. The picture is of a walled in enclosure with a single door. The gatekeeper would sleep in the doorway, barring the way in to all but the owner. In some villages there would be a communal sheepfold with a number of flocks and owners. The owner’s voice is recognised by his sheep. They will go to him and either ignore or run from strangers.

Verse 6:- A reminder that the listeners to this parable were primarily the group of Pharisees. Chapter 10 verse 1 continues immediately after chapter 11, verse 41. The following verses could identify his listeners either thieves or hirelings. Often in the Lord’s parables he is saying ‘If the cap fits – wear it!’

Verses 7 – 11:- In these verses the Lord Jesus identifies himself as both the ‘Door’, the entry into his sheepfold and the ‘Good Shepherd’, the carer and sustainer of his flock. Entry through him is essential for full spiritual life (verse 10). The good shepherd stands between his flock and any dangerous threat. On a personal note I was (and am) aware of being in some ways ‘a hireling’. As a pastor one has to keep reminding oneself that the ‘flock’ belongs to the Lord. For those with any pastoral responsibilities the words in 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 1 – 11 need to be written on your heart. For those who are members of the flock, pray for your pastors, they carry a heavy responsibility!

If we use the Prayer Book we can use these words as one of the Opening Sentences;
“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way. . . .” (Isaiah 53:6)

Thomas Cranmer drew upon Biblical language when he wrote the confession for Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, which begins: *“Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts...”*

When you make your confession, remember - *“He himself carried up our sins in his body to the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”*

1 Peter chapter 2, verses 24 - 25

For your comfort

THE Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing.

He shall feed me in a green pasture: and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

He shall convert my soul: and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name’s sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil:

for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.

Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me:

thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.

Surely thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.