

SERMON: Jesus our Shepherd John 10. 22-30; Revelation 7.9-17; Psalm 23

Dear Father, we give you thanks and praise for your Son, Jesus our shepherd. May we always hear his voice and faithfully follow him wherever He leads us. Amen

From where do we seek guidance? To whom do we turn for help? There are plenty of places and people we can go to. Mr Google and all his AI friends are a source readily accessed by millions of people every day. Then there are our tribes. It's a term commonly used today. People look to bond with like minded others. Your tribe might be your sporting club members. It could be work colleagues; maybe it's your neighbours or perhaps your family and friends. For Christians, it's often our church community.

Whoever it may be, they are people you go to for advice and support. People you trust to help you wade through the ups and downs of life. There's no denying that having such people in our lives is vital. A deep personal connection with those who love and care about us helps us to have the strength to endure whatever life throws our way. Yet no-one or no thing is perfect are they? Sometimes even the people we trust the most let us down. This is why our readings today are so important. They speak to us about someone we can turn to who won't ever let us down. Someone who will always guide us in the right way; someone with whom we can connect intimately. This someone is of course Jesus. He is described as our Shepherd and our readings have much to say about the role of this Shepherd.

Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is possibly the most well-known of all the passages in the Old Testament. It is framed by three very significant statements: "I shall not want", "I fear no evil" and "I shall dwell in the House of the Lord". Because the "Lord is my Shepherd" we have total faith that these three acts of support will come to pass.

"I shall not want" evokes beautiful imagery of lush green meadows and quiet rivers; places where the Shepherd will take us to find peaceful restoration of our troubled soul. I know that my place of peace is often as I prayer walk through the bush around Canberra. Talking with Jesus amidst God's creation calms my soul. I wonder, what's your place of peace?

"I fear no evil" reminds us that there will be hardship as we sometimes experience the darker elements of life. Yet our Shepherd is guiding us with His rod and staff, through these challenging times. Even while we're in the midst of our struggle we can gain the protection and strength of our caring Shepherd.

“I shall dwell in the House of the Lord” declares that our Shepherd wishes only to bless us abundantly, even as we are confronted by our enemies. He is with us every day of our life seeking to shower goodness and mercy upon us.

What experiences have you had of our Lord, the Shepherd fulfilling these promises?

John 10. 22-30

Our gospel reading is the second part of Jesus’ explanation of the “I am the good shepherd”. Starting in verse 4 of Chapter 10, Jesus describes how sheep will follow only the voice of the Shepherd who owns them. He repeats this in today’s reading of verse 27: *“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”*

Vid clip: Do Sheep only listen to their Shepherd? (2min)

<https://youtu.be/e45dVgWgV64?si=e2-9FkB-4FgR7cr6>

So why do the sheep follow the voice of their shepherd? You would have seen at the end of the video, the farmer starting to feed them. The sheep know that when they respond to his call that he will give them food – he is a source of life for them.

So why do we follow the voice of our shepherd? Jesus tells why in verse 28: *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No-one will snatch them out of my hand.”* The nourishment that Jesus gives us is not just for this earthly life. He is the source of our eternal life. When we choose to follow Him, He will guide us through the pitfalls of this world until we reach our destiny to be with him for all eternity. As William Barclay explains for those who accept Jesus: *“This would not mean that they could be saved from sorrow, saved from suffering and saved from death; but it would mean that in the sorest moment and the darkest hour they would still be conscious of the everlasting arms underneath and about them.”*

This image of Jesus wrapping his loving arms around us, is one that strikes me deeply. At times of personal struggle, in my mind’s eye, I have seen and felt Jesus enfolding me in his arms; I have heard the comforting voice of my Shepherd. Jesus longs to give us all this experience of His love. As He reveals in verses 29 and 30: *“What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no-one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”* Our great Shepherd is able to provide us the nourishment we most need because He and His Father are united as one. His authority is God’s authority; His love is God’s love.

Revelation 7.9-17

This unity is portrayed dramatically in our reading from Revelation. Together the Father and the Son are worshipped and glorified by countless multitudes of people from every nation across the globe as they cry out in v10: *“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

This salvation was given to them when they accepted Jesus, the Lamb. Their victory was sealed when they: *“washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* Their sins were cleansed when they turned to the crucified Jesus in humble repentance. And as v15 tells us: *“For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.”*

Verse 17 goes on to explain that; *“the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their Shepherd.”* Such is the love of this Shepherd that his sheep will no longer hunger or thirst and the sun and scorching heat won't strike them. He will guide them to *“springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

These words have been the source of great inspiration for many generations of Christians. They reflect God's promise that is contained within both the Old and New Testament. It is the promise of satisfying the hunger and thirst of our soul. There is nothing in this world that fulfils our heart's longings more deeply than being close to our Father.

And it is the actions of Jesus our Shepherd which opened this intimate pathway. As we continue our Easter Season, it does us well to consider the enormous implications of Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension and His ongoing presence in our lives today.

William Barclay expresses it well: *“The blood of Jesus Christ stands for all that Jesus Christ did, and is, in His life and in His death, whereby, we are liberated from the consequences of our past life, gifted with a present peace which is beyond understanding, and equipped with newness of life for the days to come.”*

As I finish today, I invite us to have a time of prayerful reflection. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to show us how His Son, Jesus the Good Shepherd, is guiding us in our life right now.

Time for silent reflection

Most loving Father, we worship and praise you for your gift of eternal salvation. We pray that we may humbly turn to your Son, our Good Shepherd and listen to His voice for our guidance. Amen