



St Matthew's Holland Park Weekly Bulletin 21st April 2024

This week's Revd. Morris' message: ***Who is your Shepherd?***

In today's Gospel, we hear another of Jesus' 'I am ...' statements [e.g. 'I am the

bread of life; the vine .. '] These statements resonate with one of the sacred names of God [Exodus 3:4 ff 'I AM that I AM' - the omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient One] Thus, those that heard Jesus would recognise that this is a potential claim to Divinity - to be God Himself! This metaphor of Jesus *as the Good Shepherd* is much beloved and familiar to our ears ... but what would this *Shepherd metaphor* have meant to those who first heard it?

They would have been very familiar with the important role of Shepherds in their lives. Often the flock of sheep would be the most valuable asset of the community and would be owned by one or more families. The Shepherds would be either a hired man [a professional] and or one of the younger sons of the family. As the sons got older, they 'graduated' further into the family business. Remember that the youngest son, David, was the family Shepherd away with the flock when Samuel came to visit? [see 1 Samuel 16]

Other times, the family flocks would be combined with several Shepherds working together [like at the time of Jesus's birth - see Luke 2] The sheep were hand raised by the Shepherds and the flocks were generally quite small. Thus, the sheep would know their Shepherd's voice and he would know each of them. Thus, when called, the sheep would detach from the wider flock and follow behind their Shepherd [if they were obedient - often times they didn't - they wandered off and got lost!] Thus, Shepherds had to be vigilant in ensuring that the sheep were within their protective gaze. If one did get lost, the Shepherd needed to make a difficult decision, namely, whether to leave the flock to find the lost or 'write it off' and keep with the flock. Thus, Jesus' promise to always search and find the lost [Luke 15:4 ff] takes on a deeper meaning and provides greater comfort to us His faithful, but often wayward, sheepish followers:)

This being said, the role of Shepherd was a demanding one in many other aspects also. The Shepherd needed to find the right amount of grass and supplemental food for the sheep as well as easy access to fresh water. Thus, they followed set paths around their home fields so as to not exhaust the available resources. The young Shepherd needed to be taught his craft and each of the pathways so as to keep the stock in top condition. The flocks were also a rich target for predators and thus needed to be strongly defended. The Shepherd had his 'crook' or staff to guide the sheep when necessary and his 'rod' or club, along with his Shepherd's sling, to defend them. He placed himself at the opening of the night's enclosure such that no predator could attack the flock but through him [See John 10:2 and 7 where Jesus calls himself '*The gate for the sheep*']

Often in the more desolate areas of Israel, Shepherds needed to move the flocks between summer and winter fields in order to obtain adequate feed and shelter. These often involved using treacherous passes between the plains and upper fields where predators or falling perils lurked. These were known as 'the valleys of the shadow of death' since some of the younger or weaker sheep would perish during these traverses. Yet, this dangerous path was a necessary one in order for the flock as a whole to survive and flourish. These journeys



became widely accepted metaphors of our own human life journeys. Since we, like sheep, often go astray [Isaiah 53:6] and we must at some point, at least once, traverse the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Thus, we find Ps 23 resonate with the role of the 'Good' [literally 'Ideal' or 'Perfect'] Shepherd exemplified by Jesus.

Finally, if it came to it, the Shepherd had a choice in times of extreme danger of attack, namely whether to abandon the flock to its fate, flee and save themselves or to place themselves in harm's way and risk their own life. Hired men often fled, whilst the sons, being more invested, stayed and fought. Jesus, in today's gospel, says He will be the perfect Shepherd, the faithful son of the Father who voluntarily lays down His life for all His Father's flocks in order to bring them back safely to His Father's home.

So, in this Fourth Sunday of Easter, I wonder ***who is the current Shepherd of your life and where may they be leading you?*** **Gospel reading: John 10:11-18**

Some resources to dig deeper: <https://www.gotquestions.org/shepherd-in-the-Bible.html> ; <https://renew.org/navigating-the-valley-of-the-shadow-of-death/>; <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/manners/shepherd-life-the-care-of-sheep-and-goats.htm>

Upcoming Parish Activities: Mid Week Eucharist - Wednesday 10:30 a.m; 6:30

Meditation Group; This and next Sunday Guitars and Ukulele lessons at 3 p.m.

Next Sunday's Readings: *Margaret* - Acts 8:26-40; Ps 22:26-32; *Clyda*- 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-18

Parish Directory:

Revd Morris Rangiwai: 0449 557 351; morris.Rangiwai@anglicanchurchsq.org.au.

Wardens: Heather Walker: 0411556 279; hezzie16@gmail.com

Randal Dennings: 0408 878711; randaldennings@gmail.com

Bank Details: Holland Park Anglican Church Anfin BSB 704 901; Acct: 00000760.

Parish website : <https://www.stmatthewshollandpark.com/>

Parish Private Facebook site : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/292308270851142> ;

Public Site: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61556418523933>

id=61556418523933

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY:

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Turrbal and Jagera Peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather today. We acknowledge their continued spiritual connection to country and surrounding land, sky and water. We pay our respect to their Elders, past present and emerging and pray that we may continue to learn from and nurture one another in the spirit of Reconciliation.

STOP PRESS .. If you are looking to board in a room with ensuite bathroom in secure townhouse close to transport and shops at Coorparoo... call Jacky on 0476 205 674:)