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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon :
“John and Other Flocks” ~ April 25, 2021

SERMON : JOHN CHP. 10:11-18

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

I really love today’s Gospel Reading. So direct and clear, and its imagery is so vivid. “I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” The other three Gospels show little of Jesus talking directly about His own identity and status. Rather it shows Him letting people work it out for themselves. Making the situation clear by His actions, and from the stories He tells. The other Gospels are no less marvellous, but it is good to have the contrast, in John’s very differently presented witness account of Jesus’ ministry.

John’s Gospel has no fewer than seven “I am” statements made by Jesus, which I think it is worth listing here. They are:

- 1) I am the Bread of Life (6:35)
- 2) I am the Light of the World (8:12 & 9:5)
- 3) I am the Gate (by which we can enter the fold and be saved) (10:7)
- 4) I am the Good Shepherd (10:11&14)
- 5) I am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
- 6) I am the Way, the Truth and the Life (14:6) and
- 7) I am the True Vine (you are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit) (15:1)

Such richness we have, in God’s revelation of Himself through the words of Christ Jesus. Two of them, the Light of the World and the Good Shepherd, have resulted in outstandingly popular and memorable art works, reproduced in countless Christian homes, and constantly reminding both children and adults of the closeness of God in their lives.

But there is another element in this passage that is worth noting. There is a very specific assertion that regardless of Christ’s relationship with the flock that is the main focus of the passage, there are other flocks that also belong to Jesus. Jesus will bring them also, and they will listen to His voice.

Now, St John had built up a close community of converts around him. John was almost certainly “the beloved disciple” mentioned in his Gospel, and the community benefitted from his personal knowledge of Jesus and His teaching. There may have been a bit of tension between this community and the new and developing mainstream of first century Christianity, which was led by St Peter in Jerusalem and St Paul in his ministry to Gentiles across the known world – as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and in the letters of St Paul. But it is clear from these few words in our Gospel reading that the Community of St John by no means thought that they had exclusive right to salvation. They did not consider themselves the only “proper Christians”.

I don't think that it is a particular failing of this congregation, but it is a failing which it is very easy to fall into – the belief or just a general feeling that the “way it is done here” is the only right and proper way. We love our music and the words of our Liturgy, and it is right that we should do so. But Christians come in all shapes and sizes, all colours and liturgies. Some very noisy and some practically silent. And all of them are beloved of Jesus, and come within the care of the shepherd.

I think we are quite justified in interpreting these words about other flocks even wider. Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and not just Christian or Jewish sinners. Even those terribly oppressive Romans (remember the Centurion's daughter, saved by a word from Jesus). Not to speak of those disgustingly heretical Samaritans (remember the Good Samaritan, who is everyone's neighbour, and the Samaritan woman by the well, the fortunate recipient of Jesus' personal teaching).

All the Nations - all of humankind - must ultimately listen to the voice of Jesus, and follow him as sheep follow their shepherd. And it is my clear belief that not even death can stand in the way of this inexorable voice of God's love. No mountains or chasms stand in the way of the shepherd in His search for His lost sheep. And no barriers between the Kingdom of God, and wherever else we might find ourselves after we leave this earth, will stand in the way of God's loving call to redemption. We may not have listened to His voice here on earth enough, or even at all, but we have been promised life after death, and life implies change. Death will not prevent God's love seeking us out and bringing us to Him.

But ultimately, wouldn't it be better to listen carefully for His voice in the here and now, furthering the coming of the Kingdom of God on Earth, and not just in Heaven?

Dear Lord, help us to listen carefully to your voice, and to spread your word as far as we can, among all people, of all communities, helping to bring all the Nations to you. Amen.