

**John 10 v22-30**  
**The Good Shepherd: All Age Talk**  
**11<sup>th</sup> May 2025, St Ursula's**

I have brought an animal with me this morning. What do you hope it is? It's not actually a live animal so that might make a difference to what you say! (*Show sheep*). Here it is. I think some of you may be disappointed. It's just a sheep. Sid, the sheep, which many of you have seen before as I've brought it in to church several times. If you were listening carefully, you may have noticed that 'sheep' and 'shepherd' and 'Lamb' are mentioned in our readings this morning. Let's think about what it means for Jesus to be our shepherd, and for us to be his sheep.

David and I have just returned from England. Much of the time we were in the very north of England where there are lots of sheep. In some places there are more sheep than people! (*Show picture of shepherd and sheep*). I wonder what it would be like to be a shepherd with lots of sheep to look after? A few years ago a local shepherd, near Keswick where we used to live, wrote a book called 'A Shepherd's Life' all about what it was like to be a shepherd. One of the things you learn reading the book is that it is *very hard work* looking after sheep, and the shepherd has to think about what the sheep need all the time, and look after them in all kind of weather and situations. James Rebanks who wrote 'A Shepherd's Life' said his young daughter used to get cross with him sometimes, complaining: 'all you think about is the sheep!' (*put down picture*)

The picture of the shepherd looking after his sheep is used often in the Bible. God is described as being like a shepherd, and his people are like the sheep he looks after. God leads them and feeds them and tenderly looks after them. A few moments ago, we sang a version of Psalm 23: 'The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me lie in pastures green. He leads me by the still, still waters, his goodness restores my soul.' But being a shepherd is not all about leading sheep along lovely green fields and by quiet ponds on a warm, sunny day. The sheep need looking after in wild and extreme weather, in the midst of storms, on rocky and dangerous paths. (*show the dark valley*). Even when we walk the darkest path, when we face sudden storms of pain, and suffering, when we travel through the valley of the shadow of death (as the Psalmist puts it), God our shepherd is with us. (*put down picture*)

God is our shepherd. And Jesus also calls himself the 'Good Shepherd.' What is true of God is also true of Jesus. In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus shocks the crowd around him by saying: 'The Father and I are one'. Jesus identifies himself with God. God is the true shepherd and he himself is the good shepherd. When we see the love and care Jesus has for his sheep, his people, we are seeing the tender love and care of the Father himself.

Jesus talks about his sheep: 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me.' Earlier Jesus said: 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep'. Jesus knows his sheep; he knows his people; he

knows what they need, and he will do anything for them, even die for them. He knows you and he knows me. Jesus knows that, as his sheep, we sometimes run off and get lost; sometimes we are caught in storms in dark valleys, sometimes we fall, we are injured or trapped; sometimes we badly hurt some of the other sheep; sometimes we face dangers of different kinds.

Shepherds in England today have to protect their sheep from dogs and foxes, but the shepherds of Jesus' day had to protect their sheep from wolves. (*Show picture*). Jesus is the good shepherd who will not abandon the sheep when he sees the wolf coming. Jesus promises in the passage we heard this morning that 'no one will snatch them out of my hand': no wolf, no dangerous animal, no one and nothing. This does *not* mean that nothing bad or sad will ever happen to us in this life, (God never promises us that), but it does mean that Jesus will always be with us, and in the end we will be rescued from all evil.

Jesus is the 'good shepherd' who will not run away when he sees the wolf coming, or indeed the fierce storm coming. As he says earlier: 'I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. And I lay down my life for the sheep.' Jesus gives everything, even his life, for the good of his sheep. 'All you care about is the sheep!' That's what the little girl said to her father. Well, yes, that's true of Jesus. There is no end to Jesus' care for his sheep – and that includes you and me.

Jesus cares for each one of his sheep. We might think all sheep look the same, but to a good shepherd they are all different and he knows each one and calls them by name. We are all different, but Jesus knows each one of us and he calls us by name. He knows us *and* he wants us to know him. To hear his voice and to follow him. (*Show picture of shepherd with the one sheep*).

We need to learn to recognise Jesus' voice in the Bible, through prayer, through other Christians. We need to trust in his complete love for us, and to follow him. Whatever the storms of life we face, whatever dangers, struggles or hardships, whatever fear, anxiety, or weakness, Jesus' love for us continues and he wants us to follow him. He is the good shepherd who knows us and loves us, and no one, and nothing, can take that love away from us. Sometimes our faith may waver, sometimes our love for God may be very small, sometimes we may wander off and not follow him very closely, but his love for us remains the same. He calls us back: 'follow me.'

Jesus is the good shepherd and we are his sheep. We are, each one of us, called to hear his voice and follow him. But not just on our own. As the good shepherd, Jesus isn't only interested in each individual sheep, but also in the flock, all the sheep gathered together.

We may all be individual sheep, all different, but we are not alone and isolated, we also belong together as one flock, one community, here at St Ursula's; we all have something to give and receive from one another. Sometimes we may irritate one another or even hurt one another. But we are called to learn more

about the good shepherd as we live and learn, grow and make mistakes together.

Our first reading this morning tells of a big crowd in heaven. (*Show picture of many people*). A huge number of people from all nations, cultures and languages. The people are all very different, just as we are all very different here at St Ursula's. But they are all drawn together as they worship God and the Lamb upon the throne. We've heard this morning of the sheep, and the shepherd, now we hear of the Lamb. The Lamb is a picture of Jesus, the innocent one, who died for us. But, we're told, the Lamb at the centre of the throne is also at the same time the shepherd, the one who laid down his life for us (*show shepherd picture, with lamb picture behind*). The shepherd is the one who also knows what it means to be a sheep, even a little lamb. (*show lamb picture behind*). That's a strange thing isn't it: that the Lamb is also the shepherd. (*show the two pictures together*) The Lamb is the shepherd, and the shepherd is the Lamb. The worshipping community are drawn together around this shepherd, this Lamb, and it's a community composed of people from different cultures and nations. There is one flock and one shepherd. This is a vision we always need to remember and celebrate here at St Ursula's.

So, summarizing ...

Let's remember today Jesus is the good shepherd and we are his sheep. (*picture of shepherd and sheep*).

Jesus will lead and guide us, and be with us, not only in the good times, but even in the fiercest storms and the darkest valleys. (*show picture*).

And even in the face of dangers, nothing can snatch us away from him. (*wolf*). Nothing, however dreadful, can separate us from him and his love.

Each one of us needs to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling us by name and then to follow him in our daily lives. (*picture of shepherd with the one sheep*)

But God also wants us to be gathered together in the flock; to be part of his people. (*show picture of the multitude of people*). This is not always easy. We are all different and we may sometimes be irritated by some of our fellow sheep. We need to be particularly patient with those who irritate us, or may have trodden on us, or hurt us, or ignored us. To try to care for one another; following our good shepherd in looking after those who are sick or wounded among us.

We remember that Jesus our Good Shepherd draws us together. (*show picture*) and we worship him. He is both the Shepherd and the Lamb (*show both*), and he died for us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and all he cares about is the sheep. He cares for each one of us as individuals and in our life together. So let us worship him and follow him.

## **John 10:22-30: Jesus the Good Shepherd**

### **Background Notes and Suggested Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

#### Important Context and Background

It is important to read John 10:22-30 in context and to know some of the Old Testament background.

John chapter 10. These verses are part of a longer section in this chapter of the gospel in which Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd.

- At first, Jesus speaks in the third person of 'the shepherd of the sheep' (v2). 'He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.' This contrasts with the hired hand or thieves and bandits. 'The sheep follow him (the shepherd) because they know his voice.'
- Jesus describes himself as the gate: 'I am the gate for the sheep...I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.' (v7, 9). Jesus is both the right way in for the sheep ('the gate') and the one who will lead them and care for them ('the shepherd').
- Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd: 'I am the good shepherd' (v11). It is emphasised that he lays down his life for the sheep (v11, 15, 17, 18).
- There is also great emphasis on Jesus knowing his sheep. They are his own sheep and he calls them by name: (v3, 4, 14, 27). Think about individuals in the gospel who Jesus knows deeply and calls by name: Peter (1:42), Nathanael (1:47-48), the Samaritan woman (4:29), Mary Magdalene (20:16). Jesus knows us in the same way that the Father knows him and he knows the Father (v15).
- There is a contrast between the hired hand and the true shepherd: the hired hand runs off when the wolf comes and 'the wolf snatches them and scatters them.' (v12). Jesus protects his sheep, even at cost to himself: 'I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.' (v28).

#### Old Testament Background

God is often described as a true shepherd of his people, in contrast to false shepherds (false leaders) who do not care for the sheep. Some examples below:

- Psalm 23: the Lord is my shepherd
- Ezekiel 34: 11-22. God will search for his sheep, rescue them, feed them, seek out the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak, and destroy the strong. 'I will feed them with justice.' (Ez 34:16). He will judge between sheep and sheep.

In John 10, Jesus takes up the picture of the 'true shepherd', used of God in the Psalms and the prophets, and uses this to describe himself: 'I am the good shepherd.' Language that is usually used of God is used of Jesus. Rather than answering their question: 'are you the Messiah?' (v24) directly, Jesus speaks of the works he does in his Father's name, and his care for the sheep, and finally says: 'The Father and I are one' (Jn 10: 30). This claim by Jesus to unity with God the Father shocks and angers some, who pick up stones to kill him.