

Heavenly Father guide and direct our thoughts that we may deepen our relationship with Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Last Week Michael talked of the disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus and how they recognised him when he broke bread and this week we heard how the early disciples were continuing the practice of breaking bread together in their homes as well as devoting themselves to the apostles teaching, having fellowship and praying. This has become known as the Jerusalem Quadrilateral and is foundational to church life.

During the lock down Isobel and I were able to join on line with about 5,000 families for Spring Harvest at Home where we spent time each day having teaching, fellowship, praying and breaking bread without leaving the safety of our homes.

Today is called Good Shepherd Sunday. Laying down one's life for others is very much in the forefront of the nation's thoughts at this time when we remember all those who have given their lives helping those suffering from the Corona Virus and as we commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War VE day next Friday. Of course we know too that Jesus was prepared to lay down his life for us yet we don't get to the phrase "I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep" unless we go on the read verse 11.

The Gospel passage from John that Michael read for us contains another one of the I AM sayings which has the same pastoral context. In John 10 v 9 Jesus says "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture". This was a verse I memorised when I was leading a home study course called "Rooted in Jesus" with Lionel Whatley during my reader training in West Hoathly back in 2012. It was written for an African audience many of whom still don't have a bible, so we were encouraged to memorise one verse each week. Something we found quite hard but I still am able to recall it.

Last week on the Bible society website I read of a church in Malawi that has 1000 children and only 40 children's Bibles so when it's time for Sunday School each class has 5 bibles. Each week 5 children are allowed to take them to read and they have to learn one story so they can retell it to others. They can wait nearly 6 months before it is their turn again. But they get to listen to the other children retell their story each week so they actually get to know many stories off by heart.

This kind of learning was how Jesus would have learnt his scriptures and is probably why he used many metaphors to help us to know who he was.

He knew even the phrase I AM had a special place in Jewish thinking as it was the name God used himself. So knowing and memorising the “I AM” sayings can help us focus on the nature of Jesus and God himself.

When Jesus said I am the gate he was saying if you want to know God, get to know me. That’s why he uses those solemn words “Very truly” or as Michael reminded us Amen, Amen, for only he knows and has experienced what it was like to be both God and Human.

What was he the gate to? Usually Eastern Mediterranean Sheep folds are an enclosure often of stone with only one entrance, inside the sheep where safe. In order to be safe you have got to enter the safety and security of his fold through the gate. He is the Good Shepherd and the gateway to salvation for his sheep. Ultimately he is able to save us from the problems that sin and evil have wrought on the world.

Who can be saved? “ whoever enters through me will be saved” So anyone who believes who Jesus is and what he did for them on the Cross can be saved. Another translation of “saved” is kept safe, and we all know about Keeping Safe in this time of Pandemic.

But there really isn’t much pasture in the fold, it’s a place of security but to find food and water the shepherd has to let them out. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. We are allowed out to shop for essentials and we need to find Spiritual sustenance at this time. Following Jesus in this time of being separated we have to rely on the living water and the bread from Heaven for our spiritual health and well being.

Peter reminds us that Christ is with us in our suffering and if we stray for any reason he will seek out the lost for he longs for us to return to the fold as he is the shepherd and guardian of our souls.

John records in chapter 14 that Jesus also said “ I AM the way, the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me”. So it is vital if we want to follow Jesus that we learn to discern his voice.

Let’s use this period of being locked in to spend more time with him. In the knowledge and safety of God’s love so that when we finally get to go back out

into the world we may walk confidently with Jesus, we can clearly hear his voice enabling him to lead us to new pastures and welcome more into the fold.

Amen. [938]