

**St Bartholomew's Burnley, Sunday 26th April 2026**  
(Fourth Sunday of Easter – Good Shepherd Sunday)

**John 10:1-10**

Our Gospel reading for today is probably one of the better-known accounts in the New Testament that most of us are familiar with and therein lays a challenge for the preacher. Jesus as the Good shepherd adorns our religious art in paintings, stained glass and in liturgy. Jesus as the Good shepherd is one, that resonates with us, and psalm 23, recited or sung at many funerals.

The Lord is my Shepherd;  
therefore, can I lack nothing  
He will make me lie down in green pastures;  
and lead me beside still waters.

The words are serene, soft, giving comfort in our times of need, vulnerability, hurt, confusion, and bereavement. Occasionally the Psalm is recited as words of assurance and hope for the days and journey ahead. Both aspects are present but there is also a more radical and yet unnoticed part of the psalm that calls us to radical action

In the time of Jesus people did not think too highly of shepherds. They were outsiders, often not well behaved. They sometimes allowed their sheep to graze on other peoples land, sometimes they left town without paying their bills, they often lived lonely and isolated lives and seemed to

lack what we would call appropriate social graces. As I said they were outsiders. Often the shepherd needed to protect the sheep from their own silliness so while being seen as outsiders they also needed to be on guard to protect the sheep and stop them from hurting or injuring themselves.

This view of shepherds may appear to stand in stark contrast to today's Gospel where John reminds us that Jesus is the Good shepherd., but alas no.

In the imagery of the shepherd John portrays in today's gospel and throughout the Hebrew scriptures, the shepherd is the one who,

- leads the sheep
- Provides food for them
- finds them safe lodgings
- searches for them when they are lost
- Tends their wounds for them when they are hurt
- And protects them from wild animals
- Care for them when they are in distress.

In ancient times the term shepherd was often used to describe those who ruled over nations- the kings princes and queens-the shepherds of the people. The ancients pictured their shepherd –leader going before the flock, feeding and guiding the flock, defending them and seeing to their needs.

Despite the poor image and press that shepherds of the flock had prior to and during the time of Jesus, the Church has used the image of Shepherd extensively to convey the character and nature of God and we easily identify Jesus with this same image based on the many other things we know about him from his teachings and the loving gift of himself.

Our own Anglican tradition has taken up this image to express the role of the Bishop in the church. In the exhortation to the consecration to the office of bishop, we read;

‘Be a pastor after the pattern of Christ the great shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep.’

Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd because he gladly and purposively identified with the shepherd’s humble and poor image. He was regarded as an outsider an intruder into the affairs of the religious establishment. In today’s Gospel Jesus reminds us also of false and dangerous shepherds who lead the flock astray and who exercise corrupt power and leadership not for the benefit of all but for themselves. The current crisis in the Ukraine and in the Middle East is a stark reminder to us of corrupt power. On Thursday we observed Anzac day. On this day we are reminded of how corrupt power saw the death of Millions of people of all races and creeds. Sadly we are seeing the same in some parts of the world today.

Here in today's Gospel, as in many other parts of the scripture Jesus seeks to connect with, and be, with those who were seen to be outside the fold, who were not politically correct, who were outside polite and acceptable society? He challenged those who were not exercising their leadership responsibly and without compassion.

But he did not limit his call to those others rejected. He also identified himself as the Good shepherd for all men and women, basing this call on the nature of God's generosity, grace and hospitality. He calls us all to live our lives as ones who care for each other expressing in our own lives the faithfulness and fullness of God's love. We can be thankful that here at St Bart's this concern for others is central to our local mission.

Today's Gospel passage is a call and a reminder to all who exercise leadership, whether it be in the church, business or community, of the immense privilege and responsibility that is given in the way we exercise this task. Likewise a first task in becoming fully church is to confront the challenge between what we say and what we do. When we form community we need to ensure the good news we preach is the good news received and experienced.

At the core of today's Gospel Jesus as the Good shepherd, the one who is both teacher and enabler is the place of

leadership and the responsibility all of us have in the call to leadership in all our daily activities. .

Whenever the Good shepherd calls us to exercise leadership he calls us to the highest of expectations.

Jesus uses two metaphors for himself in today's Gospel. He is the shepherd who enters by the way of the gate, and he is the gate by which the sheep enter into salvation. We are called to do likewise .

We are to show in our own lives how to live according to God's plan and we are to be the way of offering to others the love of God.

Today's psalm a regular at funerals and at other times of grief, provides words of comfort, but the reference to Rod and Staff are not just words of comfort but involve risk taking and standing up for the cause.

Stand up stand up for Jesus was a regular hymn sung during my earlier years. The meaning of the words escaped me at the time but as I reflected on today's reading the image of Jesus as the rugged Good Shepherd came to mind, as one who exercised leadership on behalf of his flock always in their interest and as faithful servant of God's divine plan for all of the creation, yet at the same time seen by others who also exercised leadership as the outsider, from left field as we say, not of the establishment.

Remember the words from Luke's Gospel, "Truly I tell you no prophet is accepted in his hometown."

It is this form of leadership, patterned on Christ himself, I suggest we most urgently need at this time, both in the church and community. Leadership which seeks to care for the people, to listen to their cries, to hear their calls, which sets aside privilege and embraces servant hood. Leadership that not only listens but also hears and responds with compassion and justice.

This is not the leadership expected only of others but starts with each of us in our relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and our neighbours.

Easter is a reminder to us not to hold on to the broken, rejected and despised in ourselves and others but instead to move forward and to grasp the hope offered in the open gate and in the person of Jesus the good shepherd and to take up the crook with compassion and love.

The Lord be with you.