

Sermon 2024 04 21 Text

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

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John 10.11-18

¹¹ 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.'

Peace is a stress-free state of security and calmness that comes when there's no fighting or war, everything coexisting in perfect harmony and freedom.

I want to reflect on part of today's Gospel; namely John 10 v 14-16.

14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

But intertwined with that reflection, I would like us to think forward to ANZAC Day and ask ourselves this question:--
What is the only acceptable outcome to war?

- Is it where I win, and you lose?
- Is it where you concede and sign a piece of paper that says, "I give up?"
- Is it some temporary peace, where I concede, but then rebuild my armies so that I may fight again?

- Do wars end when armed aggression is discontinued? or
- Do wars end when all aggression is discontinued?

If that last one is the case, I can tell you that, having grown up in an area that was settled by British and German settlers, WWII did not end in 1945.

When a third generation descendent of a German settler sought permission to marry my cousin in the 1970's; my uncle's response was that he did not fight a war so that his daughter could marry a bleep, bleep, bleep, Hun.

His attitude, however, changed remarkably when the first grandson was born and named after him. Finally, at that moment the war ended for him.

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But wars only really end when there is true and absolute peace among all. That is, "... a stress-free state of security and calmness that comes when there is no fighting or other aggressive acts; where everything coexists in perfect harmony and freedom."

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So how does that understanding of peace, inform our understanding of the Good Shepherd?

In the first part of my quotation this morning it says, "¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep."

The implication here is that, if you are already in the flock, the Good Shepherd will lay down his life for you.

The good shepherd's own flock represent the accumulation of his sweat and toil. He will fight to protect what he has.

A Good Shepherd will guard his flock absolutely, even to the point of being willing to die so that his flock might live.

In the first instance, this may seem a contradiction.

If you interpose yourself between the flock and an aggressor, and drive off the aggressor, then you have won a great battle and preserved in your own hands your precious wealth.

But if you only drive off the aggressor at the cost of your own life, then how do you benefit from the interaction? If you are an ordinary being, this wealth is no longer yours, but it remains held by your descendants. You have died preserving that wealth – but you have still died, and can have no future access to your wealth.

The parable appears to fall down here. But does it really?

For ordinary thinking only works in two dimensions – life in this world or death. Wealth is passed on so the existing generation (and future generations) of the shepherd become the benefactors of what the sacrifice.

But in this parable the benefactors are the sheep who been protected and have received eternal life by being part of the flock for whom the good shepherd died.

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But the parable does not end there. There is a recognition by the shepherd in protecting just his own flock, many are denied his protection. :--

16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

So the shepherd offers a recognition that he has other sheep, that do not belong to this particular community of his flock.

And we need to recognise that the sacrifice of the shepherd in protecting his flock becomes a perpetually repeated event until all his sheep are in one fold, protected by one shepherd.

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We do have to be careful however in understanding this final state. The shepherd is at rest because all his flock are gathered in one place. The sheep are at peace because they are in a place where they are safe from harm. And the reason they are safe from harm is not because the shepherd has eradicated those things that would do harm to the sheep, but because the sheep have learned to live together in harmony and not fear what is outside the flock.

But within the fold, the shepherd has created a place of everlasting peace for his sheep.

The peace of Christ is that war should not rise again; but is perpetually removed from the experience of humanity by the great experience of endless and universal love.

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