

7th May 2017
Morning Praise

Psalm 23 Acts 2:42-47
John 10:1-10

Life in all its Fullness

Jesus said 'I have come in order that you might have life – life in all its fullness'

What kind of a life is this?

Actually a website called 'Living life to the full' – offers online courses on: 'I can't be bothered doing anything', 'I'm not good enough', '10 things you can do to feel happier straight away', 'How to fix almost everything' ... and many more

But let's think about what Jesus meant!

(Sometimes it's easy only to concentrate on the fact that God loved us so much that he sent Jesus to die for us, but Jesus also rose from the dead, he came back to life so that we will have life with him right now, not just thinking ahead to eternity!)

Well this morning in our Bible readings, we have heard three wonderful descriptions of this life in God's care – from David, Luke (description of early church) and from Jesus. And two of them involve sheepy pictures!

In the Gospel reading Jesus describes a sheep pen, an enclosure used to keep sheep safe from wild animals that might attack them. Jesus says that we can enter a safe place like this through him. Jesus sits at the entrance to this enclosure like a shepherd would guard the entrance to a sheep fold, welcoming in those who believe and trust in him, those who are saved.

He is welcoming us into a place of safety where we can live free from fear, a place of 'quiet waters' as the Psalm says.

But in Jesus' picture the shepherd not only calls the sheep into the fold, he also leads them out to pasture. He carefully directs them and shows them the way. He speaks to them and they listen to him. What a lovely picture of Jesus our shepherd lovingly guiding us and keeping us safe.

What is he keeping us safe from?

In this picture, which Jesus is describing, the sheep are protected from thieves and robbers who come to steal, kill and destroy. Satan is a thief and a robber who wants to wreck our lives with God – either directly or maybe indirectly through other people or circumstances or our own selfish will.

What he wants to do most of all is to steal our faith away or kill our desire to keep following Jesus. Maybe to lead us astray. Or perhaps to just make us complacent about where we already are and indifferent or lacking in enthusiasm about moving forward or deeper in our faith. Are we just stuck in our walk with Jesus, happy with things as they are, not really expecting anything more? – well, I guess that would please Satan.

Jesus warns about a stranger who tries to lead the sheep astray but he says they do not follow the stranger because they don't recognise his voice. But this stranger: Satan can be very subtle in how he deals with us, his voice may be very attractive.

Going back to the sheep story – Jesus might be asking us to follow him to the good grass and quiet waters over here while Satan is hiding behind a rock whispering in our ear 'no the grass is much juicier over here!'

Which voice are we going to listen to?

Jesus says a bit later on after the passage we read, 'my sheep know me and they **will** listen to my voice'. This is a statement, a promise: if we are his sheep we **will** hear his voice. I have to confess that I tend to struggle with

knowing how or if I hear Jesus' voice, especially when I'm deliberating over some difficult decision I have to make. But hearing it put like this, it is actually an act of faith on our part to believe his promise: that if I really am one of his sheep, I **will** hear his voice. I **will** know the difference between Jesus' voice leading me, and the voice of Satan, however that might be disguised.

So where is Jesus leading us? Jesus says 'I have come that you might have life, life in all its fullness'.

What is life in all its fullness?

One way of thinking of this is that we can be sure that Jesus is with us in all the ups and downs of life, the good things and the difficult things. So we can be free from fear, we don't have to worry. This doesn't mean that our lives are going to be free from difficulty or upset, but Jesus, our Good Shepherd promises that whatever happens in our lives he will be with us and provide a way through our troubles. His power is far greater than any difficulty or trial we might encounter. There is no obstacle, temptation or opposition too strong for him. He has a wonderful plan for each of our lives, let's joyfully trust him!

Remember, we have a great God who loves us very much: *'He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things'*. (Romans 8:32)

What an amazing promise!

So let's be encouraged to live 'life in all its fullness' with our loving Lord walking alongside us in all the ups and downs of life, just like the shepherd caring for the sheep in Jesus' picture and in David's psalm. Remember, he **is** everything we need (as we sang in one of our songs earlier). Paul, in one of his letters said that he has learnt *'the secret of being content in any and every situation'* (Philippians 4:12). Apparently the word translated as

'content' was used to describe a country which had all the resources and natural products needed to be self –sufficient , nothing else was needed from the outside. 'You, Oh Lord are everything I need'

And let's really believe that if we are his sheep we **will** hear his voice and follow him obediently, even if that means stepping out of our comfort zone, taking deeper steps of faith, expecting amazing things to happen when we live and walk in his power . If we commit to following and trusting Jesus, we will experience his supernatural power working in us. As Paul said *'I can do everything through him who gives me strength'* (Philippians 4:13) – qualify: *'everything'* which we are called to do in obedience to God.

In the reading we heard from Acts about life among the believers 'Many miracles and wonders were done and everyone was filled with awe!' and 'every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved'.

This sounds like an exciting kind of life! Is it what we want to expect among our Christian fellowship?

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