

My text today, is taken from John, Chapter 10 and Verse 3
Where Jesus the Good Shepherd says : He calls his own, sheep, by name.

Friends, for a number of years, now, I have been using, the apple I phone. Now I'm not sure why, but recently, it has stopped reading, my fingerprints. Now perhaps, this is because, of all the hand washing, and hand sanitizer, that I am doing, and using, at present.

So I thought, I would replace my fingerprints, on the phone. This was easy to do, no problem. That was until, I wanted to use, my banking app. As usual I held my finger, on the sensor, and it didn't recognise it. OK, I thought I will just reset my prints for the app. Well I found it wasn't that simple, in the end, I had to reapply for my online banking. Firstly it asked for my customer number, what customer number, I thought. I racked my brain, and tried several options, only to find, none worked. Eventually I was able to reset, my customer number. It then asked for my bank account number, then the sort code, then my post code. But not the one, I'm at now, but the one I was at, when I first set up, my bank account, nearly 3 decades ago. Then it asked, for my debit cards number, all 16 digits, and then its expiry date. Success, I thought, but No. You see, I then had to set, my online Pin number, this took 5 attempts, sending back to the start, each time. Finally, all I had to do, was set up, my passcode number, and my password. An hour or two later, all set, it now recognised my finger print, it knew, who I was !!

My Friends, that's why this morning's Gospel reading is so significant, because it tells us that God not only cares for us, and loves us, but that he knows us, he knows us by name, no number required, no passcode, no password, no finger print required. God knows us intimately, better than we know ourselves, and He still, He still loves us !!

Now in spite, of the fact, that the image of sheep, and shepherd, is foreign, to our experience, the words of the Gospel, speak to us a truth, I believe, that our human hearts, long to hear.

For Jesus says, "I call my own sheep by name. And I have come, that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Now, as Christians, we often love, the imagery, of Jesus, as the good shepherd, for it speaks of a world, of safety, security, protection and provision.

Yet, as we look at our world, this all seems so alien to us. Of course in the days, in which Jesus lived out, his earthly ministry, Sheep and Shepherds were common place.

And Jesus used, the common place, in his parables, to teach divine truths. Yet as we heard in our reading, many of them did not understand, or were un-willing to hear. For Jesus says I am the gate. Who ever enters by me, will be saved, and will find pasture.

Now in Jesus' day, the shepherd would walk in front of the sheep, and at night he would lead the sheep into a pen. He would stand at the entrance, and let the sheep in one at a time, holding his staff at waist level so the sheep walked under it. In this way, he could see each individual sheep; know them by name, and note if they were in any need of attention or not.

He would then literally lie down, across the opening, as a gate, so that the sheep could not escape, and so that no one else could get in. Then in the morning, he would let them safely out into the pasture.

Jesus is the gate to eternal life, the only gate, the only one, in whose name that we find eternal life. In him, and none other, do we find forgiveness, salvation and an eternal relationship with God the father.

Jesus is the only Good Shepherd, Jesus is the one who offers us pasture, life in all its fullness, full and complete redemption; but it is up to us, whether or not, we will listen to, and obey his voice.

Now, the call of Jesus in our world today, is often "hidden" in a whole chorus of worldly voices, which beckon others and us to follow. Other would-be shepherds, seek to tempt us away from the Good Shepherd, the joy of his forgiveness and the security of his love. They tempt us with quick fix solutions, solutions which suit our worldly minds, or solutions that make what seem reasonable demands upon us and our lives.

And when we are weak and confused, we may fall victim to the enticements of other gods.

Friends, I am reminded, of the story, of an American tourist, who was travelling, in the Mid East. He came upon, several shepherds, whose flocks, had intermingled, while drinking water, from a stream. After an exchange, of greetings, one of the shepherds, turned toward, the sheep, and called out, "Manah. Manah. Manah." Which in Arabic means, "follow me, follow me, follow me". Immediately, his sheep, separated themselves, from the rest, and followed him.

Then, one of the two, remaining shepherds, called out, "Manah. Manah." and his sheep left, the common flock, to follow him. The traveller, then said to the third shepherd, "I would like to try, that. Let me put, on your cloak, and turban, and see if I, can get the rest, of the sheep, to follow me."

The shepherd smiled, knowingly, as the traveller, wrapped himself, in the cloak, put the turban, on his, head and called out, "Manah. Manah." The sheep, did not respond, to the stranger's voice. Not one of them, moved, toward him. "Will the sheep, ever follow, someone other, than you ?" The traveller asked.

"Oh yes," the shepherd replied, "sometimes, a sheep gets sick, and then, it will follow anyone."

Friends, we have seen it, haven't we ? People, young and old, who are "sick." Battered, by the storms of life, and distracted, by voices, urging them, to go this way, and that, they have lost, their bearings, and they don't know, where they are, or where they, are going. That can be, more than a little, frightening; for it leads, to despair, to hopelessness; the hallmark of many people's lives, within our society today.

And when someone, is "sick", they will follow, anyone, or anything, that will promise, a moment of happiness, a brief feeling, of peace, or a sense, that they, are someone.

My Friends, Jesus the Good Shepherd said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." We I hope believe, that there is no better way, no greater truth, no happier life, than in following Jesus, as Saviour, Lord and friend.

To conclude: We, **We**, can rest secure, in the knowledge, of our salvation, if we, have responded, to the voice, of Jesus Christ, in our lives. We can dwell, safely, in the pasture, he has, and continues, to gives us, as he calls us, and knows us, by our name. My friends, what ever happens, We, **WE**, can live, assured, of our eternal relationship, with God.

But, **BUT**, I believe, our world, in the midst, of a myriad of voices, is in desperate need, of hearing, the Church, Christ's-Ones, loudly proclaim, the Good News, of Jesus Christ, Crucified and Risen, that many, many, may put their faith, in Him.

Finally, I believe, that the Lord, reaches out, to you and me, in love, for he knows us completely, he knows us by name, and he calls out, to you and me, that **we**, **WE**, and many others, may hear his voice, call our your name, my name, that we may follow him, and live lives, to the fullest.

So, **Will we**, **Are we**, Listening, to the voice, of Jesus Christ, as our Saviour, Lord and Friend; will we follow him, will we serve him ?

To Christ Praise and Glory. AMEN

A Time of Prayer

Praise and thanksgiving

For your presence in our lives, great Shepherd of the sheep:
we praise and adore you.

For the security you offer us, great Shepherd of the sheep:
we praise and adore you.

For your life that enriches our life, great Shepherd of the sheep:
we praise and adore you.

For the sense of belonging, great Shepherd of the sheep:
we praise and adore you.

For our place in your sheepfold, great Shepherd of the sheep:
we praise and adore you.
Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Loving God, we pray for those whose lives are empty;
for all who feel alone and unloved;
for those whose lives lack purpose.
Lord of love, **bring them life, life in all its fullness.**

We pray for those whose lives are filled with anger and bitterness;
for those who cannot let go of the past,
and so have no present or future.
Lord of love, **bring them life, life in all its fullness.**

We pray for those whose lives are filled with anguish and pain;
for those who suffer depression;
for those who are filled with fear and despair;
for those who cannot see a way forward.
Lord of love, **bring them life, life in all its fullness.**

We pray for those who are ill, at home or in hospital.
Those who are ill from the corona virus.
For those who have died, and those who mourn the loss of loved ones.
May they know you love, your presence.
Lord of love, **bring them life, life in all its fullness.**

Loving God, may your abundant life
Life in all its fullness.
Fill our world, our nation, and our lives,
For we ask this prayer in the name of Jesus, the good Shepherd.
Amen.

We'll thank you for listening, and until we see each other again.
May the blessing and peace of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you, and those you love,
this day and always Amen.