

# VOCATIONS SUNDAY 2018

## Sermon Notes

### John 10 11:18 - NRSV

<sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

<sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

### Old Testament link in Ezekiel: Chapter 34

## Who, What .....Why?

When we mark specific themes on a certain date, it can become easy to explore the passage and be able to answer the questions; who is in the text? And what does this text mean in relation to the theme.

We can form a good understanding and interpretation of the text by just asking these two questions of it.

If we want to delve more deeply into a passage, we must ask the ‘why’ questions of it, and the ‘why’ questions of ourselves.

Why are events, metaphors or allegories being used in this text?

Why is this important to me?

A particularly pertinent question of this text is; Why has God called me?

When we create a dialogue between the text and ourselves on days such as Vocation Sunday – we must be open to the answers, open to a deeper understanding of what our calling is.

We often settle for the easier ‘who’ and ‘what’ questions – ‘why’ is a compassionate and often difficult question to ask.

‘Who’ and ‘what’ enable us to judge the text – ‘why’ asks us to understand the deeper discourse at play.

As disciples we must be able to ask God the question ‘why?’ – so that we can understand what God see’s in us that has led to our vocations.

Let’s begin with ascertaining the ‘**who**’ and the ‘**what**’ of this passage.

## **Who**

Who is in this text?

Jesus is narrating this parable.

Within the parable we have.

The Good Shepherd

The hired hand

The Sheep within the pen

The Sheep in another pen

Wolves

The Father

Jesus assumes the role of the Good Shepherd in this parable, and we are his sheep within that pen.

The hired hand does not care for the sheep in the way that the Good Shepherd does.

Who is the hired hand in our lives? – Do we assume here that the sheep do not know any difference between the hired hand and the Good Shepherd?

Do we know the difference?

The wolves – these represent danger, to the hired hand and to the sheep. The presence of the wolves in this parable help us to understand the difference between the hired hand and the Good Shepherd. The difference between a vocation and a job?

The sheep in other pens – do we think of the pens as churches? If so are the other sheep people outside of the church?

The Father – Jesus moves away from being the Good Shepherd to show us who is the ultimate authority in this text.

## **What**

What on Vocation Sunday is this text saying to us?

## **Themes**

- Leadership

Jesus depicts himself as the shepherd, in which his role is to protect the sheep from harm. There is no hierarchy within the sheep, none are discussed with greater importance than the other.

Therefore, all people's vocations are equally as important – and all should be able to explore their vocations.

Are we being shown Jesus' vocation in this text?

- Pastoral care

All the sheep matter, the Good Shepherd would have sacrificed his life just to protect one of the sheep from a wolf attack.

If we are the sheep – we have a deep relationship with the Good Shepherd. It highlights both the need for individual relationship – but also an understanding of living in community with others inside our ‘pen’ – but also with others in the other ‘pen’

- Whole-life discipleship

We are asked to trust the Good Shepherd enough to follow him. To distinguish him from the hired hand. The hired hand could represent the things that distract us – the earthly things that we put our trust into.

The wolves could represent the things in our lives that want to take us away from our vocations.

Discipleship and vocation require dedication and trust. Our journeys will have difficulties, there will be things that frighten us and make us question if we should stay in the pen or go-it-alone.

Would it not have been easier for the sheep to run from a wolf attack? Than to stay in the pen and trust the Good Shepherd?

Jesus does not have an easy vocation, it is one that required the sacrifice of his life – which we often just think about this in a joyful way because we know about the resurrection.

It helps to think about vocations as a journey. Jesus did not stray from his when his journey brought him to the cross – and the unimaginable pain and suffering that he went through. He instead acknowledges that his vocation required sacrifice and pain but was able to look beyond it to the next stage of his journey.

Are we able to do that?

Are we able to include God at every stage of our journey – even the tough parts?

- Listening

Vocations are more than a job. They are a calling, and we cannot understand our calling without listening. Just as Jesus demonstrates at the end of this text when he talks about the relationship between him and his Father, and the command he has received from him to “I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

Vocations are not fixed entities – instead they are opportunities to flourish and grow. To be able to grow, we must be able to listen – even to the things that perhaps make little sense.

- Openness

Jesus is not just concerned for the sheep in his pen, but instead he looks beyond that.

His pen contains the sheep of Israel – the other contains the Gentiles. In his role as the Good shepherd, he shows concern for those that lie beyond his immediate gaze.

Our vocation as a community should not be fixed or content with those who just come to us. Instead, we must engage with others outside our church doors.

Given the current decline in church numbers and ministers within the URC – is this text asking us to consider bringing our congregations together, rather than worshipping in smaller numbers across different buildings?

## **Why?**

There are several ‘why’ questions that we can ask of this text.

### **Why does Jesus choose to portray himself as the ‘Good Shepherd’?**

Jesus could have given himself a much grander vocation than a shepherd. Would this parable have worked just the same if he portrayed himself as a king and us his subjects?

## **Why a Shepherd?**

Shepherding has been shown throughout the Bible to be a noble and worthy vocation. We first meet David as a shepherd boy who was eventually called to be the King.

Shepherding was not and is not a menial vocation. In Biblical times it required great skill and courage to simultaneously keep out predators but also to keep the sheep in.

A Good Shepherd can hear the individuality of the sheep's noise. It is a relationship of trust. We often consider sheep to just be mindless followers – blindly following the shepherd.

That is not the case – the sheep understand and listen for the shepherd voice. Hence the hired help is just not able to do the same job. By Jesus using the vocation of a Shepherd in this parable he is demonstrating that even though there are many of us, that he knows us each individually. That he is willing to sacrifice himself for us.

We are shown in this text the difference between a vocation and a job. Jesus, at the beginning of this text talks about this. The hired hand is not willing to sacrifice or dedicate himself to keeping the sheep safe.

Jesus is talking about his own vocation, of the sacrifice that he is going to make by laying down his life for us. That this is something that he is doing and not something that is being done to him by the Roman Empire. He states that he lays his life down for the sheep – that this is part of his vocation.

## **Why does this matter to us on Vocation Sunday?**

Just as Jesus explains that he is following his Father's instruction – so must we be open to following our callings.

We should be open to asking why we are called?

Do we ever question why on our vocation journeys?

What qualities do we have?

This is often a difficult question to answer because we often focus on the negative aspects of ourselves. The things we cannot do, rather than the things that we can.

## **Why are we called?**

What gifts do we have to offer? The answer to this often lies in 'why we are who we are'. We often use our life experience as a negative force, attaching blame to ourselves and protecting the parts that we feel ashamed of.

Yet these are often the roots of our calling, we cannot detach our experiences from ourselves.

Sheep do not blindly follow the Shepherd, they follow because they trust the Shepherd. The more trust there is, the more likely they are to follow of their own free will.

Is that not the same for us understanding our callings?

The more we are willing to explore our calling, the more we trust it is the right thing for us. The more we trust and understand why we are called, the more able we feel to show our gifts to others.

## **Why me?**

Have we ever considered why Jesus would sacrifice his life for us? What does he see in us, that we do not see in ourselves?

By Jesus deciding to portray himself as the Good Shepherd in this parable he can show how much he loves us, in a way perhaps no other vocation could at that time. He sees everyone with equal worthiness – even the other sheep in the other pen.

Do you see yourselves as being worthy?

Do you ignore your calling because of how you see yourself and not how God see you?

## **Consider why God has called you?**