

## Year A, Easter 4

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

### Lambs

#### **I came that all may live abundantly.**

It is not possible to live life on this planet without the image of God is within us being maimed in some way either by what we do and shouldn't, or what is done to us. We need healing! And we are surrounded by things that advertise themselves as quickfix solutions, *false shepherds*. False shepherds like

- following the latest fashions
- the latest brand of coffee
- having a new this or that
- retail therapy, and so on and so on

But the truth is, these things are not satisfying: the effects don't last. They are like candyfloss, insubstantial, sticky and full of air. All wind and ...

Because we set them up as idols, and we become obsessed by them, they steal our liberty and make us do things we regret more – in theological parlance, they prevent us doing what God put here to do.

As the gospel tells us, there are lots of these tempters that sing their siren song. They all, in the end, lead us up a cul-de-sac. They don't guarantee the safety of the sheep in the fold, and they don't lead to the rich pastures outside the gate.

Jesus says he is the way to the rich pastures.

And if you want to know the way, be pleased to hear what he did say. Jesus is the good shepherd, **Jesus who came that all may live abundantly.**

#### **How does he do it?**

**The epistle tells that it is by his wounds that we have been healed.** Made whole, saved, liberated, redeemed. And since every one of us is made a Christ at baptism, it is in our wounds, our vulnerability, that we can be agents of healing for others. We have no need to hide them.

There is a notion that a façade of smoothness and perfection impresses others, that we must do all we can to hide our wounds. Things go wrong: let's acknowledge it. Even the church, which should know better, tries to pretend that things never go wrong, that problems don't exist.

This pretence never works! You know how infuriating it is to deal with bureaucrats who refuse to acknowledge that they've made a mistake. You know how healing it is when someone acknowledges that they got it wrong. And perhaps you have witnessed the effect of letting someone else see by your tears, your wounds, that you too are vulnerable. Perhaps you have seen how effective this can be in bringing reconciliation, forcing reassessment, resurrection. The truth is that positive thinking blinds us to reality.

Christ, the Good Shepherd, shows us another way. He doesn't pretend, the Gospel is about his wounds. He lives in the present: he cares nothing for rules, he cocks a snook at the Pharisees, at the jobsworths, at the Jews, at the Romans.

He is free of attachments to things and attitudes, free of obsessions. In the desert, he didn't yield to temptations to show off. And he shows his wounds, he is vulnerable.

Jesus' own story has so many elements that strike me as true because they speak of the way people are, as I am, have been and always will be. And it's that honesty, that authenticity, that is attractive.

It's the sight of wounds that tell us a person is speaking from experience, with freshness and straightforwardness. It's that lack of guile that attracts people to Jesus, makes them feel secure around him, and it's all of that in us that gives each of us the ability to serve those in distress, to provide the safety of the sheepfold.

So here's a call to confront issues openly and honestly. A couple of weeks ago I outlined some of the problems that appear to me to confront the church – this church, the churches to which I am going: how to reach the unchurched, those who don't know the Lord's Prayer, who see something macabre in eating

flesh and drinking blood. Asking what it is we do that turns away the majority of citizens. And all these confront me on the edge of Chesterfield too.

### **And I can only work effectively to address these if I am honest about myself**

Here in honesty of preaching

In my sermons, I have tried to be honest about myself. I hope I've never been holier than thou.

- Harry Williams: never say anything that isn't true for me
- expensive because I have to go deep down inside myself, look honestly at personal issues that confront me.

St Isaac the Syrian:

- It is a spiritual gift from God for a man to perceive his sins, imperfections.
- When we are face up to and recognise our faults, then the opportunity comes for the spirit to change us.

Confronting ourselves is essential.

Those who are aware of their own imperfection are inevitably the most tender, compassionate, and understanding of others who are bruised or weak. It is the self-righteous who are not suited to God's purpose.

### **And in this self-examination we need to lay the past to rest (Midsomer Murders)**

Last week we heard the Emmaus road story.

It's a story in which people could not see the possibilities of the present because they were obsessing about the past. We all do it.

Laying the past to rest is difficult. I'll confront this problem in my new parishes – my predecessor was immensely loved. I am not him, and that will probably make the first year for them and for me.

And similarly for my successor here. I urge you when Andrew comes, to accept him for what he is, and welcome what he brings. This is a complex curacy: 10 churches, 10 ways of doing things, lots of people telling you 'that's not the way we do it here'. It just doesn't matter.

So be open to what he brings, because the church needs renewal. If we find the church, or any organisation within it, simply existing for the comfort of a few, we should consider how it needs to be altered. The universality of the church demands that.

### **I came that all may live abundantly.**

And now, friends, this is my last WW Sunday Eucharist as Assistant Curate. At the end of this mass we will say the *Te Deum laudamus* as we give thanks for each other and propel each other to the future. No, not say it, but shout it – to the proper words, of course!

Since summer 2006 you have entertained and provoked me as I have, I hope, entertained and provoked you. I thank you for the fun we have had together, the delight and joy. And remember this, without delight and joy, we are in hell.

Joy and Charity, JC, Jesus Christ. Listen to George Herbert:

AS on a window late I cast mine eye,  
I saw a vine drop grapes with *J* and *C*  
Anneal'd on every bunch. One standing by  
Ask'd what it meant. I (who am never loth  
To spend my judgement) said, It seem'd to me  
To be the bodie and the letters both  
Of *Joy* and *Charitie*; Sir, you have not miss'd,  
The man reply'd; It figures *JESUS CHRIST*.