**Epiphany Burnett**

**Easter 4B**

**April 26, 2021**

Jesus says

“I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd

lays down his life for the sheep.”

We are eager to race ahead

And look for different images

In the passage

Stain glass windows

Childhood Sunday school projects

Psalm 23

Funerals perhaps

Yet, the passage

Should be read with

this

particular

Lens in mind

The good shepherd

Lays down his life for the sheep.

Many Anglican

and Episcopal theologians

get this right

Jesus crucifixion

Is the all effective means

Through which

The reconciling

Judgment of God

Takes shape[[1]](#footnote-1)

One theologian,

Fleming Rutledge

Writes,

“It is precisely God’s

Infinite resourcefulness

That undergirds the

Rectification of the ungodly…

God holds the unbelievers

In his purpose.”

We might add

God holds the seekers

The sinners

The wayward

The lost

Confused

And questioning

In God’s purpose

To quote

Rutledge again,

‘God obliterates

The reign of the Enemy

On behalf of those

Who lie beyond

The bounds of Christian

Fellowship’

God has obliterated

The power

Of sin

Over my life

And over yours[[2]](#footnote-2)

Now then

We might turn

To the passage

The hired hand

Sees the wolf coming

And leaves

Christ saw

Crucifixion coming

He even prayed about it

And did not

Leave Jerusalem

But made his way

To the cross

Humbly

And willingly

We might ask

About our work as

A Christian community

We are called

Not to abandon

The sheep

Those in need

Even if it

It costs us

Remember we are asked

To pick up our cross

Our cruciform shepherd’s staff

Jesus then says,

The hired hand runs away

because a hired hand

does not care for the sheep.

Christ

Does not turn his face

From Jerusalem

Instead he sets his face

Like a flint

Even in the moment of

His friends abandonment

He goes alone to the cross

Our presence

Our years of commitment

To fellow members

and people of Burnet

Reveals our care

And our love

If we do nothing

If we are not present

In the lives of people

Outside our parish

The people of our

Towns and cities

Do not know our love and care

Instead they may perceive us

As a hired hand

Jesus then says,

Good shepherding

Means you know the sheep

Do we know the people?

Of our town

Of Burnet?

Do we know our community

Do we know the poor

The helpless

Those who live on the margin

And do we know their name?

It is one thing for a congregation

To be like the old TV show Cheers

Where everyone knows your name

Jesus challenges us

As shepherd like communities

To know the names

Of those in our wider fold

Jesus then says,

He knows ‘the father.’

We imagine this

As part of his human life

As his life of prayer and retreat

We might ask

Do you know God?

Are you in conversation with God?

On Sunday

Or regularly

Daily?

Do you know God

And does God know you?

Again,

Jesus reminds us

The cruciform nature of his work

And our communal work

What is your commitment to this work?

Jesus is all in

He will give his life

What will you give?

Then Jesus

Says

I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.

We can spend a lot of time on this

A whole sermon or PhD thesis in fact

Books have been written

It boils down to this…

Jesus is in love

With all people

And with people

Who are not here

As part of this

Particular Christian community

Of Epiphany Burnet

All people

This invites us to image

Who are we invited

To love?

Who are we invited to

Discover that is not here

Now?

Jesus intends,

To love them

And bring them together

That is your work

To gather them together

Bring them together

In a way that they

See and know they are one flock

Jesus

Then speaks of God’s love

Given to him

Because of his work

Specifically due to his

Cruciform life of sacrifice

And his cross and death

God does not desire sacrifices

The scripture says

But we are invited

We are invited

To give glory to God

To worship

To undertake mission

By to serve

God invites

Us as a community

To a cruciform life

And, our work is a response

To Christ’s work

God loves us

And we return God’s love

Through our service

Jesus says,

(In the last bit

of our passage)

that the choice is his

His work

As shepherd

And upon the cross

It Is his choice

Neither, God’s

nor others

This is important

No one can make you do this work

God will not make you do this work

It is your work

It is affirmed in your life

At baptism

It is invited

From the arms of

Christ upon his cross

Yet,

As it says in

In the first letter of John

‘he laid down his life for us

and we ought to lay down

our lives for one another.’

God is inviting you

Inviting us

To be

good shepherds

for the community

that is your church

and

in the city of burnet, and all those around

God invites us

To pick up our cross

our cruciform shepherd’s staff

and follow

the one

who did not flee

but set down his life

for you

and all others

1. NT Scholar Robert Farrar Capon writes "his death is the operative device by which the reconciling judgment of God works - that the crucifixion is God's last word on the subject of sin, the final sentence that will make the world one flock under one gracious shepherd." (*Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*, p 376) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fleming Rutledge, *Crucifixion*, page 695. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)