

4th Sunday of Easter

John 10.1-10

On-line pre-recorded service Bradford Cathedral

Hello and welcome to Bradford Cathedral or to be more accurate my sitting room.

This is Pippa.

I doubt she'll stay on my lap for very long. We got her in December. She is the newest edition to our family and were not used to having a kitten.

For the first few weeks of owning her, no matter how much we called her name, she just refused to come. Slowly with lots of treats and love and affection she finally began to respond to her name. I think she's about to get off now, yes she's had enough so I'm going to put her down.

Recognising whose voice to follow is always an important skill that we learn from being a young child, but as we get older it gets more difficult.

In John's gospel Jesus talks about the role of the shepherd, the gate and the gatekeeper, something everyone listening to Jesus was familiar with. Keeping sheep safe was always difficult as both thieves and wild animals preyed upon them.

At night the sheep were often kept in the sheepfold.

The sheepfold was often built next to a home, hewn into rock if possible to create three strong walls with a

single entrance. The gatekeeper's job was to protect the flock at nighttime by guarding the gate restricting access to all.

The job of the shepherd, was different, their role was to lead the sheep to fresh pasture each day, to keep a watchful and protective eye over them.

The relationship between the shepherd and the sheep would be so close that the sheep would know the shepherds voice and follow willingly and in trust because at the end of their journey there would be good pasture to graze free from worry in the protective gaze of the shepherd.

So when Jesus starts talking about being both the gate and the shepherd, it doesn't make sense how can you be both? ...and yet in our heart of hearts we know it makes sense.

Jesus as our savior is deeply committed to our safety and wellbeing, his death on the cross demonstrated in the most powerful way that there is nothing that he wouldn't do for us.

Just like the shepherd his love for each one of us is tender and intimate, he calls our name to lead us to new pasture, new possibilities and new adventures.

Sometimes we follow the wrong voices – voices that don't have our best interests at heart, that don't keep us safe.

They are not voices that will give us eternal life and that deep peace, which only that knowledge can bring. Those voices can be many and varied,

When we follow the voice of Jesus, we discover new possibilities in our lives.

But how do we recognize Jesus voice?

Many of the people I have been fortunate to speak to over the last few weeks tell me that they have had more time to reflect, pray and read their Bibles. This is proving a precious part of their day.

As we listen to God through reading the Bible and praying and singing the more we will recognize his voice and His presence around us.

God longs for us all to know His peace and His joy and to embrace all that we can be, **which is always more than we expect.**

God knows us better than we know ourselves as the Psalmist says 139.....

¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

God utterly delights in us and wants to see us flourish.

When we follow Jesus we become **more not less**, and the promise of eternal life means we journey with hope and expectation.

And we don't have to do this alone, the image of the shepherd is a powerful one, because the shepherd will always search out the lost and bring them back to the flock....no matter what they've done wrong.

When we find ourselves together, loving each other as Jesus loves us then our communities become places of hope and restoration.

Every Thursday the nation joins together to give thanks for the NHS, in that moment the nations solidarity and communal spirit gives us a glimpse of what heaven on earth looks like.

We have before us all a wonderful opportunity to give more of ourselves, to exploring the wonders of God's love for us; to accept God's invitation to join with His mission, to love the world into a place where all flourish.

The sheep followed the shepherd, not as unwilling slaves, but with freedom and joy because they understood the shepherd would lead them safely to new pastures.

Today is vocations Sunday.

A day to reflect on God's call on each one of us, but also on the church in these new times.

It is not something to be fearful of, but rather listening to God to explore the new pastures we are called to inhabit.

I love this Message from Pope Frances for the world day of vocations...he says...

“The Lord’s call is not an intrusion of God in our freedom, it is not a “cage” or a burden to be borne. On the contrary, it is the loving initiative whereby God encounters us and invites us to be part of a great undertaking.

He opens before our eyes the horizon of a greater sea and an abundant catch.”

In the midst of fear and worry, we have hope as we look to Jesus, our great shepherd, let us listen for his voice calling our name, and in trust follow him to new possibilities.

God bless you all with his peace and his joy, with curiosity for where he wants to lead you and stay safe. Amen.