

Lifegroup notes from Sunday 4 September 2022

Reading: Psalm 23, John 10:14-18

As we enter into a season of challenges – both as individuals and as a nation – I believe we need to see again how Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

God self-reveals as shepherd in psalm 23, a psalm that speaks of the intimacy David knew with our Heavenly Father.

David describes how the shepherd:

Provides for our needs

Tells us when to stop and rest, and when to move

Nourishes us in every way

Overcomes our enemies, even giving us space to pause and be nourished in the midst of battle

Comforts and protects us in the most difficult of life experiences

Provides an everlasting home for those who follow well.

Note, He is likened to the shepherd, not the sheepdog. The sheepdog snarls and nips at heels, threatening a violent encounter with recalcitrant sheep. The Shepherd has the trust of the sheep, and goes before them. They follow Him because they have come to learn that where he is there is all that is needed for the full and complete life. Jesus reminds us that His sheep know His voice.

So, we need to have a clear vision of the shepherd to guide us through all that the days ahead hold, but we also need to learn how to follow well. That firstly means learning how to discern the voice of God for ourselves (that still inner voice, the Spirit's influence on our conscience, the illuminated Word of God, the guidance of the community of believers, the wisdom of a recognized leader). And then, once we have discerned God's voice, to follow. It is entirely possible to become expert in hearing God's voice, but to never follow! What foolishness! (the kind of foolishness Jesus describes in the parable of the wise and foolish builders).

So, take courage, get a vision of the Shepherd who guides us, even laying down His life for us. Learn to follow, and follow well, and then live the full life He has prepared for you.

Some questions

- What encouraged or challenged you in this message?
- What part of the shepherd imagery speaks to you most, or challenges you?
- Looking at the list of things Jonathan describes the Shepherd as doing – what experience have you had of these?
- How do you hear the voice of God? Is it one way, or many ways?
- Have there been times you've heard God's voice, but not followed? If so, why?
- How can we hear God together, and for each other too?