30 April - 6 May 2023 Jesus the influencer

John 10: 1-10

Read the passage from John. It is written below.

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

10 “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

7 Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

**Bible notes**

This is the nearest John’s Gospel gets to the parables found in the other Gospels. The story has a rich biblical hinterland. Moses (Exodus 3.1) and David (2 Samuel 5.2) were shepherds, and both Jeremiah and Ezekiel expected God to send wise and just rulers to shepherd his people once their exile in Babylon was over (Jeremiah 23.1-4; Ezekiel 34.23-24). Famously in Psalm 23, God himself is compared to a shepherd.

Jesus speaks in great detail of the relationship between shepherd and sheep. The shepherd knows them intimately, calling them by name and leading them into and out of the fold in the daily rhythm that guarantees them pasture and rest. The sheep are safe and secure because they are known and cared for, guided and protected throughout their daily routine. Like the best of Jesus’ parables, this one is open-ended. What does it mean for Jesus to be the gate (v.7)? Who might the gatekeeper or the stranger be? Who are the sheep? What does it mean to know and be known? What does having ‘life abundantly’ entail? The story is sandwiched between the healing of the man born blind (John 9) and the raising of Lazarus (John 11). This suggests that ‘knowing’ is an image of pastoral care: healing, sustaining, keeping safe, even across the boundary between life and death. ‘Being known’ means feeling sufficiently confident and secure to follow Jesus into the wider world, trusting that he is able to bring out the best in life. The dynamic of knowing and being known is where Jesus’ influence lies.

The broader background of the shepherding images warns against too narrow an interpretation. Jesus’ ministry fulfils God’s promise of faithful, just and wise leadership for Israel. What might this kind of ‘knowing’ and ‘being known’ look like in our day?

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

Jesus is talking to the Pharisees using an illustration to make his point. The Pharisees do not understand what he is saying through the illustration, so Jesus repeats his point. The relationship between the shepherd and the sheep is one of trust. The shepherd is known by the sheep as the one who provides shelter, protection and food. They are known by the shepherd who is committed to their wellbeing. The illustration shows those trying to break this relationship with the intention to kill and destroy. The comparison between the shepherd and the thief is stark more so when Jesus identifies himself as the shepherd and the gatekeeper giving life in abundance to those who follow him.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* If Jesus were a modern-day influencer, what hashtags might he use?
* What does it mean for you to be known by Jesus?
* How does this influence or shape your life?

## Prayer

*Adapt to your local context.*

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

Jesus calls us by name and leads us out.
He is always with us, surrounding us with love and protection.
Lord, we go out in the safety and security
of knowing we are part of your flock.
Thank you for our sense of belonging:
to our church family.
to all our other family, work, and community groups.
May we never lose our sense of inclusion.
May we know our true identity in you.
We go in your name, gracious Lord,
to offer our lives in your service.
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

As we leave this place,
go with us and guide us through the coming days.
Protect us from harm and help us to hear your voice.
Create opportunities for us to share your love with those we meet.
**Amen.**

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