

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

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Good Shepherd Sunday – Acts 2 42-47, Ps 23, 1Peter 2 19-25, Jn 10 1-10

Budget night approaches and big questions are being put to government about their commitment to the poor and down and out: housing; jobseeker; tax cuts – what's their legacy going to be? Anglicare's been in the news with ACOSS and other agencies confronting government with these questions. That's their job and ours; speaking up for the needy. We're mindful of this today, Good Shepherd Sunday, as the readings are about caring leadership. In today's Gospel, John the Evangelist reveals Jesus as *the Good Shepherd*. John contrasts Jesus' leadership of wisdom, loving kindness and willing vulnerability with the negligence, stubborn blindness, pastoral insensitivity and political fearfulness of the established leaders of his day.

Nowadays, where leadership is routinely under the microscope, it seems fair to ask what history makes of the leadership of Jesus. Is the legacy Jesus left behind enough to prove that he really *was* the *Good Shepherd*? You can best tell how good a leader is by the legacy they leave behind; not just how things were when they were around. So did everything good about Jesus' community depend on his being physically there? Did he only keep up the quality and momentum of his movement by his personal charisma and skill? Did everything fall in a heap once he was gone?

Or did Jesus leave us a legacy of more inspired, skilled leaders? Did the people who took up his mantle keep up the good work he modelled? Because that's the measure of a true leader; what happens once they've moved on. Today, in our reading from Acts, we get a chance to look at just that. It's

a short reading, but it's got a lot in it. It's a picture of the new-born Church in the days after the first Pentecost. So what was it like? In Acts 2.42, we read that the new believers ***devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.***

So four things made up the foundation-stones of the community life of Jesus' earliest followers; learning together, sharing fellowship together, breaking bread together, and praying together. These are foundation stones which have served us for twenty centuries. And where these foundation stones are present, we truly experience Jesus' care of us. The extraordinary is somehow possible. So we read in the next verse, ⁴³... ***... awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.*** Wonderful; but is that where it stops? It could be quite inward looking and cosy, couldn't it. But what actually happens?

I'm struck first by the extraordinary inclusiveness of this community. Just before today's passage, we're told it numbers about 3000 people ^{v.41}, and that it's drawn from 'every nation under heaven' ^{v.5}; 15 regions are named. And today we see this new, multicultural community spontaneously assume care of its needy members.

We'll do it for a family member: but for some strange people from far to the east of the Holy Land, or way down in Africa; people we've never met before? They're Jews too, but even so, this is wild. And it gets wilder. ⁴⁴... ***all who believed were together and had all things in common.*** ⁴⁵***And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.***

They've only just met! I'd say the Good Shepherd lives on here; wouldn't you?

Another thing that strikes me is the way the new-born Church

doesn't huddle together in a ghetto and hide from confrontation. And heaven knows, with what happened to their founder, they'd have every right to be cautious. But no, they're out there in the general community, even in the Temple, enjoying each other's fellowship and hospitality, and making a positive impact wherever they go. ⁴⁶***And day by day continuing with one mind in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,*** ⁴⁷***praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*** ^{NAS}

This is no reclusive cult, is it. Again I'd say, the Good Shepherd lives on in these people. The good things they enjoy, they receive with gladness and share with open hearts. They make themselves vulnerable to strangers by doing this. And their impact is all the more powerful because they do. Jesus' legacy lives on.

It's perfectly clear from these few verses that Jesus is the Good Shepherd: that his good leadership practices of wisdom, loving kindness and willing vulnerability left an astonishing legacy. They were taken up consciously and passed on by his followers. So the Church's gifts to the world include hospitals, pilgrim hostels, soup kitchens; care offered to total strangers often at great cost and risk.

These gifts the Church passes on came to us first through those four basic practices the new-born Church inherited as Jesus' legacy all those years ago; ⁴²***... they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*** Learning together, sharing fellowship together, breaking bread together, and praying together. I delight in the fact that this legacy lives on in us – in our commitment to Christ, to each other, to others, to the various missions and causes each of us supports, to the

care we offer together through St John's Youth Services. The Good Shepherd calls us on.

So I wonder what's next? Any one of us could be the bearer of our next mission. What do you hear him calling us to do next? His legacy lives on in us. Christ is risen! Alleluia! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.