

Boys' and Girls' Brigade Closing Parade Service – 3 May 2020

Psalm 23 – Knowing God's love – He walks with us in the valley.

The Lord the Shepherd

A Song of David

¹ The Lord is my shepherd.

I have everything I need.

² He gives me rest in green pastures.

He leads me to calm water.

³ He gives me new strength.

For the good of his name,

he leads me on paths that are right.

⁴ Even if I walk

through a very dark valley,

I will not be afraid

because you are with me.

Your rod and your shepherd's staff comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a meal for me

in front of my enemies.

You pour oil of blessing on my head.

You give me more than I can hold.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will be with me

all my life.

And I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

The coronavirus, is probably the biggest challenge, that many folks have faced in their lives. The fear of the unknown. I watched the film *The Elephant Man*, the other evening and it is a disturbing film because it shows humanity at its worst and its greatest. It's a true film based on the life of Joseph Merrick, who from a 3 year old

child has tumours and his tumours distort his body and face. His looks are not easy to the human eye and when people see him, their first instinct is to recoil away. He was abused by unscrupulous men, who used him as a freak show in their circus – people would come and laugh and taunt him and call him all sorts of names but there was a doctor who took pity on him and also some good people, who defended his humanity. In a moving part of the film, where he has managed to escape from those who had held him prisoner in a circus in Belgium. He is now in a railway station in London, with a paper bag over his head; some youths make fun of him and so he runs and accidentally knocks over a young girl. The people at the station trap him in a corner and they pull a paper bag from his face and they see his badly deformed face and Joseph Merrick called out, “I am not an elephant I am a human being”.

Joseph Merrick said that the biggest challenge that people face is dealing with the unknown and he was right – ignorance causes wars and causes fear causes hatred.

At the moment, we are covering our faces, we are socially distancing ourselves from everyone but as someone said, it is social distance not emotional distance and so we have got to see that the face behind the mask is a real person; the face 6 feet from us, is still our friend or our brother or sister.

Tianna’s reading for us today about The Lord being our shepherd, is a very important reading for us at this time because it is a reading, that helps us in our fears. The person who wrote the psalm, speaks about a dark valley.

⁴ Even if I walk

through a very dark valley,

I will not be afraid

because you are with me.

Your rod and your shepherd’s staff comfort me.

A dark valley would be an intimidating place for a shepherd to be. He is leading his flock through a place of danger. There may be wild animals on the hills, there may be bandits or attackers ready to pounce on him. He and his flock are vulnerable and so he is fearful, as he should be and yet he has to keep on going but it is at a time like this, that he realises that he is not alone, that in the valley is one greater.

In the darkness he has a friend and that friend is walking with him. That friend is greater than him, that friend is God, the One who created him and who sustains him. And God is with him to protect him and to care for him and to love him. God is

walking with him. He has a rod to beat away the enemies, he has a staff to keep the sheep from straying.

The writer of the psalm is David, who was a young shepherd boy; he was brought up caring for sheep and one day, he was on the hills when he saw the giant Goliath and he heard Goliath taunt his people and he said to King Saul, I will fight the giant and so he did.

The giant was over 9 feet tall and David was only a 5 foot boy – the giant had protective armour, David had only a sling and five stones; he went to fight the giant in the valley between the hills and its in times like this that he knew that God was with him in the valley; even if I walk through the dark valley you are with me. You see, The Lord is my Shepherd, was not just idle words for David, for he had been right there in the valley and when he faced Goliath the giant, Goliath laughed at him and make fun of him. He said to David, “who do you think that you are, coming to fight me, you are a nothing but a boy and I’m going to have you for my breakfast” but David said, “I come to you, not in my own strength but in the name of the Lord of heaven, Creator of heaven and earth” and with that he attacked the giant with his catapult and his stone lodged into he giants skull and the giant fell to the ground and David was triumphant. He won the victory in the valley, because the Lord was with him.

What darkness are we facing TODAY; what particular valley are we going through, you don't need to it go alone, for we have one who went through the darkest of valleys for us and who calls himself the Good Shepherd but that’s for our next talk.

Luke 15 v1-7 – Knowing his protection – when we get lost...He comes

³ Then Jesus told them this story: ⁴“Suppose one of you has 100 sheep, but he loses 1 of them. Then he will leave the other 99 sheep alone and go out and look for the lost sheep. The man will keep on searching for the lost sheep until he finds it. ⁵ And when he finds it, the man is very happy. He puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. He calls to his friends and neighbours and says, ‘Be happy with me because I found my lost sheep!’ ⁷ In the same way, I tell you there is much joy in heaven when 1 sinner changes his heart. There is more joy for that 1 sinner than there is for 99 good people who don’t need to change.”

Why did God send Jesus to earth?

It's a good question.

Well Jesus tells us, for God so loved the world, that whoever believes in him will never perish but have eternal life.

He sent Jesus into the world because he loves this world.

God loves this wee planet. God created hundreds, thousands, millions, billions, trillions and the figure is endless, of different planets and stars and yet he loves this one.

This is his special one.

This is his masterpiece. God designed this wee world in which we live. He painted every flower. He designed all the natural laws and he created every bird and animal and he made you and me and he loves us.

Bottom line is this God loves this world.

God is passionate about this world – He cares for it he is involved in it.

But God gave us all free will – we are not puppets; he has made in such away that we can think and act as we please. He has made us free, not as puppets on a string but free to be the people that we want to be.

But God wants us, more than anything to do what he wants...to do his will. He wants us to become like Jesus.

So back to my original question

Why did Jesus come into the world?

He came into the world to show us what pleases God.

He came into the world, for the world had forgotten God – they had forgotten what pleases God and Jesus came to teach us two things.

Two things of primary importance

Firstly, we are called to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind.

God wants our heartfelt devotion – he wants to have first place in our hearts. Now that can be very difficult because there are so many other things that want to be first.

Isn't there?

We are bombarded, with things that take the place of God but Jesus said “love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind” and when we do this, he said “everything else will be added”. In other words, get this right and God will bless us with all the other things that we need to live and survive and enjoy life.

So first and foremost, we are called to love God with our heart, soul, our mind and our strength.

The secondly, to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

Can we do that?

Yes! we can, because we love God and put him first, then our neighbour`s needs will be important to us and we will please God by loving our neighbour.

But what happens when we mess up?

What happens when we get things wrong?

When we don't love God as we should or love our neighbour as we should?

Is that the end? Of course not! and that's what Jesus came to tell us.

That God knows we will mess up – God knows we are not perfect and that we will like the lost sheep go astray but what Jesus tells us is that God is searching for us.

God never gives up on us. He is out there in the valleys and the mountains and the deserts, looking searching, for any who might come home and trust him.

You see, Jesus knew that God was like a good shepherd.

People had lost sight of who God was before Jesus came; He came to show them that he was the face of God and that when we look to Jesus, we are infact seeing the image of God.

If you ever want to know what God is like; then you can get a telescope and look at the stars, you can study creation; you can get a microscope and look at cells but the best place to go, is to look at Jesus, in the Gospels, for there we have a face of someone who is compassionate and loving and caring and the wonder is that that he loves you and me, so much, that the story tells us that he went to the cross and died for our sin, that we might be put right with God. He doesn't ask for anything, except that we accept his gift of love and that we live lives, that are pleasing to him by loving him and loving our neighbour.