



# SAINT LUKE'S

“#YOUWILLBEFOUND”

EASTER 4

ACTS 9:36-43

PSALM 23

REVELATION 7:9-17

JOHN 10:22-30

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

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Jesus speaks about discipleship in several quite different ways. We may be so familiar with the gospel Scriptures that we overlook this basic fact. Jesus says: *Follow me*. Discipleship is presented as a clear choice to follow him in seeking the Kingdom of God.

Elsewhere Jesus stresses singlemindedness: *Let the dead bury their own dead.*<sup>1</sup> *No-one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit [or: ready] for the kingdom of God.*<sup>2</sup> Discipleship is not one decision among many, it is an exclusive choice; *no one can serve two masters.*<sup>3</sup>

Jesus also talks about the cost of discipleship<sup>4</sup>: seeking the kingdom of God is searching for the *pearl of great price*.<sup>5</sup> If we knew only those parts of Scripture, we would think discipleship is purely our level of commitment to Jesus. Yet today we hear something quite different about discipleship: Jesus' commitment to us. Jesus speaks of discipleship as being shepherded by him. In a way, he follows *us* about, making sure we come to no harm. We are tended to, looked after, searched for when we go missing.

Jesus the Good Shepherd is such a beloved and accessible image. We think of Jesus tenderly rescuing a lost sheep, carrying it home on his shoulders back to the rest of the flock. But even our beloved Psalm 23 doesn't stay in the green pastures and by the still

<sup>1</sup> *Matthew 8:22; Luke 9:60*

<sup>2</sup> *Luke 9:62*

<sup>3</sup> *Matthew 6:24*

<sup>4</sup> *Luke 14:25-33*

<sup>5</sup> *Matthew 13:45-46*

waters forever. Sheep are high maintenance and good shepherds have to go the extra mile often. I have done a lot of travelling in Scotland and there are sheep everywhere. In rocky and remote areas there are often more sheep than people. Often, you see sheep on the wrong side of the fence. Somehow they have gotten through the fence and can't find their way back and are stranded by the road, in danger of being hit by a car. If you are hiking a coastal path, you often see sheep that have again gotten through the fence and are on the edge of a rocky, steep cliff overlooking the sea. Sheep do not know what to do when they are stranded that way. They freeze up and bleat pitifully, paralyzed with fear. The shepherd has to come and physically pick them up, and carry them back to the flock. If sheep are not found in time, they die from hunger and exposure or lose their footing from exhaustion and fall onto the rocks below. Sheep desperately need shepherding.

I have just finished reading *The Unwinding of the Miracle* by Julie Yip-Williams. It is a chronicle of the author's journey with terminal cancer. It is a profound description of the valley of the shadow of death. Yip-Williams does not identify as a believer in any specific religion, but she has a deep assurance of

an after-life in the midst of that valley. That valley – those liminal places – are exactly where the good shepherd promises to be with us, just as much as Jesus is with us beside the still waters. Thy rod and staff, they comfort me, the Psalmist writes. The Good Shepherd never abandons his sheep.

If the Good Shepherd was simply meek and mild, that would not be strong enough for the realities of life and death. In Jesus the Good Shepherd, power is always subordinate to love, but it is invincibly strong. Jesus' voice is a threat to other kinds of authorities and leadership, and the powers that be want him eliminated. The Good Shepherd is in the Temple today – in the center of power – for a Hebrew Feast day. The next verses in John's gospel tell us that some of the Jewish authorities fetch stones that they might stone Jesus. Stoning is the Hebrew punishment for blasphemy. Their rage is not because Jesus says he is a shepherd – that is not blasphemous – but that he links himself to God and shows his Divine power in signs and miracles of love. If the Good Shepherd was simply gentle, meek and mild, there would be no threat. As it is, the Shepherd's voice is so powerful that it competes with other voices, and that is a problem for some.

I suspect that many of us may find it relatively easy to identify the voices that are not-Jesus, *not* the voice of

the Good Shepherd, out there in the world: voices of hatred and division, exclusion and violence. But what might those other voices be closer to home, within your life? Voices that threaten and coerce? Voices that feed you lies about yourself? Voices that diminish you and cause you to feel worth-less? Voices saying you are not love-able, that you do not belong and never will – to Jesus, to a community?. Voices of fear that the best is all in the past? Voices of anger and resentment?

Voices that whisper to you: there are valleys so deserted and remote, places so full of suffering, that Jesus will never find you there. Valleys of addiction, disease, loneliness – valleys the Good Shepherd won't even notice, let alone enter, to rescue us. These are lies. Jesus voice calls to us when we are lost. If we cannot hear him, Jesus will always come to find us - often through others. Maybe you have never wandered that far away. But the further we have wandered the more extraordinary it is that we are here today. The truth is, we are each of us here because in some way Jesus has found us. This week, I saw the show "Dear Evan Hansen". It is thoughtful and powerful. And the show's tag line: #YouWillBeFound is a pretty good summary of this gospel.

I remember a former spiritual director radically

reframing my understanding of my own story, changing my internal narrative of my faith journey. As I explained my coming to faith in Jesus as a young adult, he said: “You think *you* found Jesus but that is not what really happened. Jesus found *you* through other people, other Christians. Think of all those Sunday School teachers you had. Your parents and godparents who had you baptized as a baby. The wonderful, loving Christian adults who influenced you and prayed for you, who were kind and encouraging to you. Your friends who made the gospel so attractive in their lives. This is how Jesus found you, reaching out again and again through friends and family until finally you heard his voice and recognized Who was calling you”.

Our faith is not a self-made story. It is not all about our wisdom. When we follow, it is only because Jesus found us first. We hear his voice. We want to hear it more. Jesus pledges that nothing and no one will take us away from his love and care. *You will be found*. The next question is: who is Jesus going to find through you? Who is Jesus sending *you* to find?

AMEN



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