

The theme for our morning's meditation is, "The Good Shepherd." Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd." What does he mean by claiming to be the good shepherd? The adjective 'good' tells us that there are both good and bad shepherds in the world. When we think about a good shepherd we think of a person who makes sure that his sheep are well watered and well fed. He is to be a guide to them leading them to green pastures and bringing them back when they are well fed. A good shepherd should also be one who is willing to give his life for the protection of the sheep.

In John's gospel Jesus teaches that anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a robber. Thieves and robbers jump into the sheep pen with the intention of looting and destroying. The sheep is symbolic of God's people and the shepherds are the leaders. Jesus' opponents thought of themselves as the legitimate shepherds of God's people. However, the Pharisees who fail to recognise the healing of the blind man were the blind and unreceptive shepherds.

Jesus says that the sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Three important things stand out in this text. Firstly, the sheep hear his voice. Obedience to the voice of the shepherd is the way to life. So we too are called to listen to the voice of Jesus. Secondly, he talks about 'his own sheep' and leads them out. This shows the ownership of the sheep by the shepherd. There is a sense of belonging. Thirdly, the shepherd knows the sheep by name. Shepherds usually gave nick names to their sheep according to their colour, spots, or size and remember them by name. Similarly, Jesus the good shepherd knows us by name. The challenge for each one of us is to belong to the good shepherd and be obedient to him.

Jesus says that the good shepherd goes ahead of them and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers. A good shepherd guides and directs his sheep in good paths. He means the best for them. We all need direction in our lives as we are constantly at cross roads waiting to take a decision. The good shepherd gives direction to us.

Jesus also claims saying, "I am the gate." He is the gate to eternal life when we believe in him and invite him to be our personal saviour we will be on the road to eternal life. Jesus says whoever enters by me will be saved. Saved from what? Saved from sin, saved from the attacks of the roaring lion Satan, who is waiting to steal, kill and destroy. Jesus saves us from all the attacks of the evil one. He is the good shepherd who neither slumbers nor sleeps. The Psalmist tells us, "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his people, the sheep of his pasture." Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Jesus says he has come to give us life and abundant life. Abundant life is a life filled with purpose, a life which is content in God no matter how rough the external circumstances may be.

In John 10:11 Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for a sheep." Jesus proved himself to be the good shepherd by dying on the cross for us so that we may live.

As we go through life with all its difficult circumstances let us hold on to the words of Jesus that he is our good shepherd. He knows each one of us by name. He knows the pain and agony you are going through; he knows the tough decisions that you have to make, he knows your weaknesses and strengths. We can take courage because he watches over us. He is the one who nourishes us. He will protect us from the evil one. Just as David said in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." So we too can say the same thing if we make the Lord our Saviour and Shepherd and have a personal relationship with him. May the good shepherd watch over you and bless you.