

## **Pastor Writes**

Greetings to you all. Our theme for this morning is, 'The Good Shepherd.' In the Psalm read today, a Psalm which we have all learnt from childhood we see that David calls the Lord as 'my shepherd.' When we meditate on the Psalm we see that David is able to call the Lord as his shepherd because he himself was a shepherd and he knew what it meant to be living out in the cold and taking care of the sheep. When David is about to fight with Goliath, he reminds King Saul that as a shepherd who had taken care of his sheep he had fought with lions and bears and had killed them. David was showing that he was willing to put his life at stake for the sake of the sheep. The shepherd imagery has a lot to communicate to us about God's character and so David uses this metaphor to describe his relationship with Yahweh.

Similarly, in the gospel reading Jesus claims to be the good shepherd who was willing to lay down his life for the sheep. While talking to the Pharisees, Jesus tells them that anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in by some other way is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gate keeper opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. By saying this, Jesus was showing that he was indeed the shepherd of the sheep and the Pharisees and other leaders were actually those who were misleading the people and were like thieves and robbers. Jesus uses this picture to show that he is really the true shepherd and the gate keeper opens the gate for him and the sheep listens to his voice. In both these instances there is an element of knowing: The gate keeper knows the shepherd and so also the sheep know him and listen to his voice. Listening is not just hearing but obeying. Jesus also claims that he knows his sheep by name. Each one of us have been fearfully and wonderfully made by God and Jesus knows us by name. There is tremendous assurance and encouragement when somebody knows us by our name.

Jesus as a good shepherd is also one who leads the sheep out. The sheep follow the master's voice. They will not follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. Jesus was indirectly accusing the scribes and Pharisees of being thieves and robbers who the sheep did not follow. The good shepherd always leads us in the paths of righteousness. Jesus then claims saying, 'I am the gate of the sheep; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.' Jesus is claiming that he is the way to eternal life. It is through him that one can enter the kingdom of God. It is through him that we can be saved from our sins.

Jesus then concludes by saying that 'the thieves come only to kill, steal and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full'. Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life for each one of us. Hired hands will run away when they see a wolf and abandon the sheep. However Jesus says, 'I am the good shepherd! I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father- and I lay down my life for the sheep.'

Jesus came into the world as the good shepherd and laid his life for all on the cross voluntarily. He did that so that though his life, death and resurrection all the lost sheep will come back to him. Jesus paved the way for us to have life eternal, and have it to the full. Jesus calls us to participate in this new life which he offers to us. May we in this Easter season know Jesus as the good shepherd and experience this abundant life. May we as his sheep walk always in the paths of righteousness.

*Shalom*

**Paul Swarup**