

Sermon for Second after Easter, 2021

Ezekiel 34:11-16. 1 Peter 5: 1-11. Psalm 23.
John 10:11-18.

The Collect: Almighty God, who has given thine only Son to be to us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Ezekiel 34:16 'I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and strong I will destroy; I will feed them in justice.'

Are you feeling lost? I vividly remember the time when my mum took me down to the market when I was about three. No, she wasn't trying to sell me off! Incidentally, it was the indoor section of the market, where one practically tripped over the galvanised shovels and buckets at the hardware stall. The place was interesting to a small boy; especially the Dinky Car section. But, for a moment I must have been engrossed in something, and got separated from mum. It wasn't unusual to hear a message on the Tannoy asking for the parent of Sally, or Tommy, who has lost their mummy, to go to the Market Supervisor's office to collect them. In my case, I don't remember an appeal being broadcast, but I do recall the moment when I ran up and grabbed the legs of the the lady with the brown coat, only to find that it was a complete stranger. I suppose I'd be had up if I did that these days!... As far as I know, the correct mum claimed me back, eventually. But, there is a dark side to that market place, as it was the very location from which the Moors Murderers abducted their young victims, and the same period in which it happened.

Feeling lost is a stomach-churning emotion for a young child. But, it is bad for an adult too. Panic can be very unpleasant. Further, when panic turns into heaviness and despair, it distorts its shape so that it can't be grasped or defused. There is an existential dread involved, wrapped up in uncertainty, when a person doesn't know which direction to turn to find a pathway home. However, there is a ray of hope: a light on the horizon. Jesus said: 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.' (Jn 8:12). There is even better news: He wants to know where you are. He is coming to find you! He is 'the good shepherd.' No Shepherd worth their employ would ignore the fact that one of his flock had gone missing. He would not be trustworthy if he kept going back to the owner with excuses every time the flock got smaller.

Perhaps you remember being lost as a child yourself? At such a young age I had no concept of geographical location. There was no awareness of logical planning; no rational solution. Nor was there a considered sense of the amount of time that had passed since I last saw mum. It could have been seconds, but it seemed like hours. There was just apprehension:

fear! What would have transformed that into still-watered peace? What could you say as an unknown adult to a frightened three year old child to reassure them? Yes, you probably would say something like: ‘Don’t worry, your Mummy hasn’t left you. Let’s find her.’

Our instinct as a normal adult would be to summon help for the sake of the child. But, children are not the only ones to feel the dread of being lost with no idea how to get back to a place of safety. It happens to us as adults too in all forms of loss. And the solution Jesus proposes is paradoxical and radical. He tells us to act like a child would! Mt 18:3 ‘Verily I say unto thee that unless ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not see the kingdom of heaven.’ The words ‘be converted’ there can also be ‘change’... ‘unless you change.’ When we contrast our own ability to solve a bad situation with Jesus’ ability to do so; there is no contest! Yes, there are some geniuses who speak nine languages by the age of three, but, I wasn’t one of them; are you? For most of us, we rarely get beyond the emotional reading age of a late adolescent. The good news is that Jesus doesn’t rate us in that way. He is quite clear that we will never see clearly, nor heavenly, until we trust Him. We must stand and wait, open, expectant, and obedient, listening for his voice.

What do we say to the adult who is struggling to cope with fear of being alone in a dark place; being trapped in a dreadful situation, with their panic, with their depression? What do we say to reassure them that (ala Julian of Norwich) ‘all manner of things will be well’? In fact, it doesn’t matter much what we say as long as we don’t contradict what Jesus said. We must not pretend *we* are their guide out of darkness into light. The solution, the resolution of fear, is to be found in ‘being converted’, namely to let the mind empty itself of half-baked ‘adult’ answers. In the end, all that matters to the lost child is that mummy is found. In the early development of a child’s mind, they don’t work with abstract concepts to the same degree that most adults do. Likewise, we have such a slight awareness of God’s love and concern, that we, like children have to learn to trust. We and they are powerless to do otherwise.

Brothers and Sisters, there is a Good Shepherd who never ceases to seek His sheep. Let’s not complicate things for Him by pushing through the hedge to find our own way back. Our Collect bids God to ‘give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit.’ So, let us resolve to Trust that He is coming to look for us, and to lead us into the peace He has won for us. ‘I myself will search for my sheep.’ (Ezek 34:11). As St Peter tells us: ‘Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.’ (1 Peter 5:7). Learn from the paradox: that you must become as a child to see. Being an ‘adult’ is so infinitely less than being God. So, let’s stop trying to be one for ourself and trust Him.

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.