

The Good Shepherd

- John 10:1-42

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The thing about sheep is that they're defenceless. They don't have claws or talons or spikes. They'd be hopeless if a bear arrived, or a tiger. They don't have speed or strength of limb, or anything else to protect their woolly hides. They don't even have an aggressive nature. It seems that from the day of their birth, sheep are vulnerable, needing each other [the strength of the herd] and also needing a shepherd – someone to feed them, and guide them, and care for them. What would they do otherwise? We don't see sheep in the wild.

And Jesus knew it. He called himself the good shepherd [John 10:11], and he called his people his sheep – his people who had been longing, for thousands of years, for a shepherd, and a place to lie down in green pastures, and to be led beside quiet waters [Psalm 23].

And then Jesus told them that a really good shepherd knows his sheep. A good shepherd calls his sheep by name, and he leads them out. And of course in response, the sheep hear his voice and they follow him, because they trust him, and they know his voice. They would never follow a stranger [John 10:5].

It's a beautiful imagery. When I read it, I imagine my name on Jesus' lips. I feel the grass beneath my feet, and the strength of his love for his people, including me. I want to follow him, or just lie down in the grass nearby, feeling thankful.

But there's more than that in the passage, more than a safe field, and a shepherd nearby. Jesus said that all who enter via the gate will be saved... and they will be given life – life in all its fullness [John 10:10]. That's his promise.

Do we ever wonder what that means? Does 'life in all its fullness' include a world where human relationships are

marked by freedom, justice, health and peace, where there is access to human rights [and needs] for everyone, where every human being is treated as a person made in the image of God?

At the International Nepal Fellowship [INF], our vision is to see Nepali people, particularly the poor and marginalised, experience 'life in all its fullness'. It's a key part of our vision, and prayer, and work – and the heart of our community health program – the reason that we facilitate 200 self-help groups in the remote region of Jumla, because every single human being is valued, and loved by God, and deserving of 'life in all its fullness'. And there is an aching need! Apparently, a woman in Nepal is still 42 times more likely to die in childbirth than a woman in Australia. We need to respond, in every way we can.

But every day we also remember that 'life in all its fullness' is grounded in the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ – the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep – and not just for the sheep in the fold, but also for the others, much further afield... because they too would hear his voice, and know him [John 9:16].

I love that promise. Once again, the vast story of God includes every one of us – the hopeless, defenceless sheep. We too, wherever we are in the world, even those far, far away, can hear his voice and respond. We too can receive life in all its fullness, and then spend our days offering it to others, in all the ways we have been gifted to do so.

Let's keep considering that this year, as we prepare for Easter... because we know and trust the Good Shepherd... and because we know deeply that his promises are true. We will never be lost in the wild, again.

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