



O God, you have made us for yourself,
And against your longing there is no
defence.

Mark us with your love,
And release in us a passion for your justice
In our disfigured world;
That we may turn from our guilt and face
you, our heart's desire. Amen.

What do you call a sheep with a sports car?

A Lamb-orghini...

A sheep dog, who has just got all the sheep in, says "That's all 40 sheep." A shepherd says "What - we only have 37??"

The sheep dog says "I know, I rounded them up"

How are a joke and a sheep similar?

Once you've herd one, you've herd them all.

In the Bible people are very often compared to SHEEP. David, the psalmist, a shepherd himself, employed this analogy repeatedly. In Psalm 100:3, he said, "We are God's people and the SHEEP of His pasture." In Psalm 77:2, he wrote, "God, You lead Your people like a flock..." Again, Psalm 79:13, says, "We, your people and sheep of your pasture, will give You thanks forever." And in Psalm 23, his most

popular Psalm, David wrote, for himself and everyone who would use what he was writing in worship, “The Lord is my shepherd.... “

Throughout the Bible we see this parallel drawn between us and sheep. One of my favourites is in Isaiah 40:11, where it says that God, “...tends His flock like a Shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart.”

That’s you and me he’s talking about!

Today’s Gospel reading also sees us as the sheep and God, in Jesus, as the Good Shepherd - and it goes on, in John 10 v 11, ‘The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep.’

Now, we could go on and on citing scriptures that infer that we are similar to

sheep. Why are there *so many*? I have heard it said that of all the animals God created---the species that most **NEEDS *guidance*** and *helping out of a mess, regularly*, is SHEEP.

First of all, no insult intended---I mean you and I are in the same boat – indeed, the same sheep-fold here---but sheep on the whole are not the brightest of animals.

Have you ever seen a group of trained sheep in a circus? No. You've seen trained apes and even trained mice or rats or dolphins but ***never*** trained sheep!

Secondly, sheep are dirty and wayward. Real sheep can't keep themselves clean, and they smell atrocious. Plus, they tend to wander off easily, perhaps because they can't see very far....less than 15

yards. And, no matter how many times you bring wayward sheep back, they are prone to wander off again because they can't learn from their mistakes.

Third, sheep are defenceless and dependent. They don't have much of a bite... to make matters worse, they are top-heavy and their legs are spindly. This makes them slow.

And fourth, sheep are easily frightened and confused.

Now, God doesn't compare us to sheep so often in the Bible to put us down. He never wants to do that. Rather, he makes this comparison so often because He wants to communicate one very important truth to us. He wants us to know that we are designed to NEED a

Guide in life. As David wrote in the 23rd Psalm, we need Someone to lead us on paths that are right...We need a Shepherd with a "rod and a staff" to protect us.

Q. How, then, do we access the guidance of God that we need?

The Bible sends us back, again and again, to three ways of accessing God's guidance and joining in with what God is already doing:

1. In our prayers;
2. In studying the Scriptures;
3. In service to the needy.

Sharing prayer and Bible-study with other Christians really does enable you to access God's guidance more powerfully. It will be good to get this going again when we can

– meanwhile, I’ve been finding Twitter very useful for that. All these are ways of listening to God.

Jesus said, in today’s Gospel reading:

“The sheep will listen to the shepherd’s voice.”

Don’t be surprised if you don’t hear anything from God, if you’re not listening!

– so pause for personal prayer – and listen! It is lovely that we can pause to pray and reflect together using Utube.

Once we can meet again we shall be able to do as Acts reminds us the first friends of Jesus did – they did mutual teaching and learning, they had a bit of fun together and supported each other – good fellowship! – and they broke bread and

prayed together. All these are ways of listening to God.

And the Bible is quite clear that God is present particularly sharply in the poor and needy – so that we hear in Acts that those first Christians ‘gave to anyone as they had need.’ Quite a challenge ...

John also tells us that each one of us matters to Jesus so much that, ‘he lays down his life for the sheep’ – for us!

This is a God who just loves recklessly and is foolishly indiscriminate. It doesn't matter to God whether we are rich or poor, young or old; or what school we went to, or what clubs we are members of. No, ultimately, ‘there will be one flock and one shepherd’ – not a superior religious flock, and the also-rans. Instead -

the good news is that every single person is equally loved and cherished by God. Every single person is a lost sheep, for whom God searches relentlessly. Every single person is a child of God for whom he died.

Seen this way, fullness of life is not about being Superman or Wonderwoman – it is far more about knowing our *interdependency*, and living in a relaxed way (whether in lockdown, or partial lockdown – or whatever) – ***living in hope***, because we know in our hearts that where we are weak (and we are!) God is strong – though never with throwing his weight around. It is God's inexhaustibly enduring love that **we can rely on**, today, tomorrow, in or out of lockdown – indeed,

God wants to 'get it' in our hearts, that
we can rely upon his inexhaustibly
enduring love – always!

Let's pray:

O Christ for whom we search,

Our help when help has failed,

Give us courage to expose our need

And ask to be made whole;

That, being touched by you,

We may be raised to new life,

In the power and vulnerability of your
enduring love. Amen

The God of peace,

Who brought from the dead our Lord

Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep,

Through the blood of the eternal covenant,

Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight: and the blessing+.