



St Michael's Anglican Church

655 Brunswick Street

New Farm, 4005

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21st April 2024 – 4th Sunday of Easter

If you have been to animal shows, you will notice there are different ways to treat and train an animal. At a circus, elephants, lions, and tigers obey their trainer who uses a whip. He cracks the whip and they obey. The elephants rear up and trumpet, the lions and tigers jump, roll, and snarl when they see and hear the whip. On the other hand, dog shows are different. Dog owners do not have whips. They have biscuits for the dogs to train them to jump, dance, and perform all sorts of fascinating tricks. Their dogs will do anything for the love of those treats.

Jesus proclaims: "I am the Good Shepherd." We are God's people, the sheep of his flock. Whips and biscuits do not work on sheep. You cannot have them obey by cracking a whip or throwing a biscuit. We are God's sheep. But ironically, we use whips and biscuits to run our spiritual and social lives. Some people obey God out of fear. We also make others obey by whipping them into fear. God is wrongly seen as a divine policeman ready to pounce on us when we sin or stray. Fear and not love mark our relationship with God. But this is not how it is supposed to be. He is the Good Shepherd. We are his flock.

There are those who obey God and then wait to receive spiritual rewards – biscuits, if you will. If you do something good, God will recompense you. If you do something bad God will deprive you in some way, of something. And so we learn to obey out of self-interest. And isn't that also how we interact with others? But throwing spiritual biscuits is not God's way, nor should it be ours. If this is our mindset, we find it difficult to reconcile it when we are good but still suffer trials or difficulties or when others are bad but seem to be enjoying the perks of life. We become disheartened because we don't receive the biscuits we expect.

John's Gospel offers us two symbolic images of Jesus' as shepherd and ourselves as sheep. The first is the staff. It has a pointed end to protect the sheep from enemies. Never to strike the sheep to get conformity or obedience. The other end is a crook to lift us out of the holes into which we fall through our foolish choices. Like sheep, we are dumb not because we are unintelligent but we follow the herd blindly and obstinately because of trends, peer pressure and influence. In spite of this we are loved by a shepherding God whose arm is not too short to reach down and lift us up with the staff of his boundless compassion and relentless love.

The second symbol of the shepherd is his voice. Over time the sheep get to know the voice of their own shepherd even among a myriad of other flocks and shepherds. It is the shepherd's voice that will give direction and protection, calling them run from danger and threats, to gather for food, to lead them to safe resting places when night time closes in. For the sheep to survive it must know and hear the shepherd's voice...." I know my sheep. My sheep hear me. They know my voice and they follow me."

But we can only know the voice if like the sheep, we have a deep and abiding relationship with the shepherd. Even in our daily lives, the voices we know are those with whom we are bound by ties of love and friendship. We recognize their voices immediately, when they call us on the telephone. They don't really have to introduce themselves, we knew them from the first syllables they utter. Because they are a constant in our lives, hearts, and thoughts.

Can you hear the voice of the good shepherd? Only his sheep can hear his voice with so many other voices vying for our attention. Only if we constantly present ourselves to him even without the incentive of whip or biscuit; in prayer and confession; even if we keep on falling and can't see the sunshine and rainbows of life. Stay close to him in whatever way works for you. The more we try our best to stay close and maybe get even closer to God in our lives, the more we will hear the voice. Just hang on to him and you will hear his voice and his staff will lift you up. He is the Good Shepherd and we are his flock. Blessings, Fr. Ian.

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We pray for:

- The Anglican Church of Australia
- The Diocese of Riverina: †Donald Kirk; Clergy and People
- The Parish of Oakey: David Snape – Missioner Locum
- St John's Home for Aged Men - Toowong
- All Saints Anglican School, Merrimac: Staff and Students
- the family and friends of Ted Stangler and Kenneth Walters whose years mind occurs at this time

We give thanks for the life and witness of:

- St Mark, evangelist and martyr, feast day 26 April

ANZAC Day Prayer

God of love and liberty,
we bring our thanks today for the peace and security we enjoy.
We remember those who in time of war faithfully served their country.
We pray for their families, and for ourselves whose freedom was won at such a cost.
Make us a people zealous for peace,
and hasten that day
when nation shall not lift up sword against nation
neither learn war no more.
This we pray in the name of the one who gave his life for the sake of the world:
Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.

Hope

Old spirit, in and beyond me,
keep and extend me. Amid strangers
friends, great trees and big seas breaking,
let love move me. Let me hear the whole music,
see clear, reach deep. Open me to find due words,
that I may shape them to ploughshares of my own making.
After such luck, however late, give me to give to
the oldest dance... Then to good sleep,
and - if it happens - glad waking.

Philip Booth (1925-2007)

Offertory – Ongoing financial support for St Michael's by way of direct debit.

Bank: Westpac
Account Name: St Michael And All Angels
BSB: 034-065
Account No: 131728

Alternatively, you can send a cheque to the parish treasurer c/655 Brunswick Street New Farm, 4005. Cheques are payable to St Michael and All Angels.

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Jacqui Hunter 0419 793 742

John 10:11-18

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away--and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.

18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."