



The Shepherd – Restorer of our Souls

An address for the Cosmic Mass ● 15th February 2009 ● Rev Louise

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

John 10:1-5, 7b-16

Good morning and welcome to this service.

Well, it has been quite a week. Each of us will have responses to the events of this week. We will feel with those who are shocked and find themselves without homes and those who have the deep grief and distress of loved ones dying in the fires.

We may also have some reflections on what we have seen and heard. A couple of weeks ago Rev Antoinette spoke to us of prayer as a divine conversation. It has occurred to me that the heavens, the spiritual worlds, are speaking to us right now. It seems they need to speak very loudly.

In these events, when the spirit is speaking, we need to ask ourselves if we are listening. What is it that we are hearing? What is it that we are seeing? To what is it that we are paying attention?

There are many things that can be taking our energy and attention and I think they can seem very justified and right and good. But we need to hear and know what the spirit is saying to us. So for each one of us: where is our energy going and to what are we paying attention?

Of course we need to attend to those who are suffering and distressed and without homes. Suffering does have the power to unite us; we find ourselves able to extend ourselves beyond the confines of our own being, to feel with others, to care for their circumstances and to provide assistance if it is needed.

We must also hear what the spirit is saying to us with these events.

I think we can see that some of the response is excessive. There is some kind of excess, there is a kind of madness in some of the responding. Something has been unleashed.

Even with all the frenetic activity, the calls for help, there is an element of emptiness to some of it. It rings a false note which gives rise to sentimentality and do-goodery. Some of the response seems to be about making ourselves feel better, rather than meeting the real needs of those who are affected.

Events as mighty, as rapid and powerfully destructive present us with some realities which we tend to find difficult. The tearing down and away of what seems so important reveals to us how much we are caught and identified with this material world.

How easily and quickly and fully what we hold dear can be taken away! We are faced with the impermanence, the transitory nature of this world, the fragility, the unreality. We imagine this world to be safe, secure and reliable. We place an importance on the events such as this last week tear away the veneer of the safety and security and reliability. There are forces, Michael forces, trying to free us from this illusion and so we suffer.

But there are also anti-forces working to maintain the lie, the illusion, of the reality of this earth life. This is a battle for our souls. Will we remain tied to this world of matter or will we identify ourselves with, the divine, the eternal, the ineffable spirit that lies behind?

Some of the responses we have seen to the devastation of the bushfires has been about maintaining this veneer, keeping it in place. Restoring the world to as it was before, not letting us see the lie that pervades our lives.

What is the spirit speaking about in these events? We are asked to see beyond the material, to hear the spirit speak. We are also asked to look into our own beings – to see with what we are identified, to examine from where it is we have a sense of security, comfort. What motivates us? What is of value to us?

Fire and water

These are spiritual events in material form. In these last few weeks, if not longer, we have been presented with the two mighty forces of fire and water. – the fire that rages and the water overflowing, uncontained, out of control, destroying. What is the spirit telling us about ourselves? The fire and water are separate – there is too much or not enough. There is no harmony in our being between the forces at work. Fire and water are at odds.

We could wonder about our bodies – our etheric body, our astral body. Are they harmonised, working together, or at odds, separate? Our beings are not unified, but divided, in conflict, at war, causing destruction. There is a spiritual warfare around us and within us.

It is one of the great mysteries of Christ that terrible events which reveal to us the reality of our being are also the means of our upliftment and transformation, the means by which what is real can be revealed. Participate in evolution.

Calling forth the divine

There is a need, as Rev Robert said last week, to call forth the divine within us; to hear what the heavens are saying to us, to see the spirit at work.

One of the very beautiful figures from the Bible which speaks to us of the Christ, and the divine within us, is the Shepherd – the Good Shepherd, the Lord is my Shepherd. When we think of a shepherd we think of one who cares, tends, protects, nourishes, guides. In the First

Letter of Peter (1Peter 2:25), the Shepherd is described as the guardian of our souls. In Psalm 23 the Shepherd is described as the restorer of our souls.

So, the Shepherd is an important figure for us in our spiritual and soul life; in the transformation and evolution of our souls. We encounter this figure in a number of Bible passages. We'll look at some of these and hopefully the Shepherd can become more real for us as the guardian and restorer of our souls.

Watching the flock, hearing the angels

Firstly, we'll go to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, where the birth of Jesus has just taken place.

*And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; **for to you is born this day** in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.
Luke 2:8-20*

These shepherds are very active – they listen, they hear, they receive, they tell, they take action. Even though it is night they are awake, keeping watch, taking care that all is well. They would be looking for signs of danger, they guard and protect. These shepherds can hear the heavens, they hear the angels message that something new has been born.

And this passage tells us that it is born to them – the passage says *for to you is born* a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. This is not an external event; it is occurring within them. They follow the prompting of the angels and hear the songs of praise and they themselves glorify and praise God.

These shepherds are connected to the higher and the lower, the reality of their own being and their lives and the reality of the heavens. They communicate with humanity and with the heavens. They receive from the heavens and they tell of the reality of Christ.

If we think of this within us it is the shepherd who hears of heavens song and encourages full involvement with our lives. And they also can prompt us to follow of the guidance of the spiritual worlds.

Feeding with good pasture, returning and reconciling

The next passage is from Ezekiel 34. The first few verses of this chapter tell of the shepherds who do not do their job well. They don't care for and feed their sheep. Then we come to verse 11:

"For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness...

I will feed them with good pasture, and upon the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on fat pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God.

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 the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice.

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 14-16

The Shepherd is the Lord who feeds his sheep with good pasture, he rescues those that are in danger and searches for those that are lost. This shepherd reconciles us to ourselves, heals and uplifts. It is this shepherd which takes the sheep to feed on the mountains of Israel. So it is the shepherd which bring us to God, which takes us to a higher consciousness, which brings us to that which nourishes, that reminds us of where we belong.

And all of our being can be healed and taken to the highest by this shepherd. All our being can be cared for, attended to. Nothing is lost or left out.

The Good Shepherd – laying down his life

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

The good shepherd will sacrifice for us. There is a presence within us, a spirit within us that seeks the best for us. Our spiritual welfare is the central concern of this shepherd. The good shepherd sees our soul, knows our soul, knows the truth and gives life to our souls. We can be guided and directed. It is a loving presence within us calling (voice) us to the divine. We are never alone, separated and without if we look to this shepherd.

Restoring our souls

Now we come to the final passage for today, Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

He restores my soul. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.* Can this become real for us?

This is such an idyllic picture – of peace and tranquillity and harmony. Green pastures, still waters. We tend to seek this peace and tranquillity here on this earth; we seek it outside ourselves and in our lives. But this passage ...*the valley of the shadow of death*... This is surely our life here on this earth. We are reluctant to see for real how caught in matter we are in our lives on this earth.

However, with Christ, and the shepherd, we can become reconciled and unified within ourselves, it possible for our souls to be restored. So this idyllic picture is to become a reality within our being and we are able to live in a way the expresses spiritual reality and truth.

It is the divine within, this shepherd who can be our guardian and comforter. The shepherd is with us; caring for our souls, guarding our souls, restoring our souls. It is a picture of harmony; an etheric body which flows with healing and nourishment and an astral body with its desires and emotions of service, flowing and purposeful.

What we have seen is the state of our beings – raging, out of control, flooding, separated, at war. But these events are also the means by which we can be changed, made whole, harmonised.

There is an intensity and an urgency in the evolutionary forces at the moment. Knowing the shepherd will keep us able stand.

*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.*

So shall it be.

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The Collect

In the silence that pervades our hearts
let there be the ability to listen,
so that we can hear the voice that whispers of truth.

May we realise that we are but children of the dust;
Yet be reminded that when we feel subjected to this earthly life
your divine majesty is vibrating within us.

O gracious and loving shepherd of the sheep,
We bring before you those who have died
So recently in the bushfires.

We commend them to you and pray that you will grant them
A quiet resting place and a full and happy communion with you.

So shall it be.