

As the fine liquid of infused olive oil ran down through the locks of David's hair, over his ruddy and filthy face, the stench of one working amongst the sheep gave way to the myrrh, cassia, cinnamon and essence of cane oil. The sweet-smelling dew, which David likened as running down the beard of Aaron when he was consecrated to attend the Ark of the Covenant now set him aside to lead the people who strive with God, Israel.

And there, the image of the Good Shepherd Boy David gave way to be the first in the line of the Good Shepherd, the best of whom would come from his line, Jesus Christ our Lord.

I doubt if there were any niceties such as the smell of Chrism Oil when the shepherds visited the manger. Having been out on the plain, unbathed, covered with sheep scat and perhaps a mixture of damp wool and lanolin would have added to the beautiful romantic scene that we call the Christmas nativity. Have no bones about it, shepherds wreak. Even in Australia, the country that built its wealth on the backs of sheep, there is nothing really appealing about the prospect of sharing a meal with shepherd whose standard bluey, soaked with sweat, was not likely to be exchanged for a nice tie for dinner.

We are content, more often than not to see the image of Christ our Good Shepherd leading us on, lambs under his arms, immaculately coiffured and squeaky clean.

It is now 35 years since the Church of the Good Shepherd was destroyed on Ash Wednesday Fires. Those whom I met who knew the Church from visiting outside the fold, the city folk and tourists, all talk of a much loved and beautiful sanctuary on the mountain. Many of the locals talk about it with reservation and a melancholy that certain reflects the mourning of the loss of a good friend.

From the fold that was Good Shepherd, and Holy Trinity, Macedon, a new fold for the sheep has been created: the Church of the Resurrection. It is seen by those who go there as 'their' church, it is seen by many outside the fold, the wider area, as 'the community' church.

Around the fold where the sheep are kept, fed, and nurtured, the shepherd is expected to be close at hand, keeping out the dangers, and fearfully protecting. Reality may well have been a bit different! Jesus tells us that the hire hands soon abandoned the flocks if their own lives were at risk. This is what makes him different. He was prepared to even lay down his life for the sheep. This is not the comfy issue of the Good Shepherd that should be romanticised.

Often, we sanitise our faith to that which is comfortable and acceptable. The Shepherd should only be concerned with the sheep here, and whilst making some lip service to an outward inclusion, also known as mission, and they well do remember where she or he draws their stipend. And none of this smelly shepherd nonsense: keep clean, but don't overdo the frankincense and myrrh!

Is this the model of shepherding Jesus gives us? I think not.

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

Some congregations only welcome like sheep. Some denominations require that people be found to be in good standing with the elders before they come to communion: to be one with Jesus. But where is this Jesus? Well, he's the smelly rough looking one outside mingling with the lost sheep trying to encourage them in to be with the ones that are already in there. And who he calls may well raise more than the odd eyebrow.

Today, in the life of the Parish, there are some who are indeed rejoicing and celebrating the recognition and ability of all to now enter into a legally and binding partnership under the marriage laws, to the mutual exclusion of all others. There are also others who are challenged, unsure, and unsettled.

I thank the many people who have contacted me, sharing their concerns, prayers and journey. That is part of what being in the same fold is about. The important thing that we do underscore today is this: the sheep know the voice of the Good Shepherd, and yes, there are times when God calls through Jesus matters that are for us a challenge. The true marks of the Church are how do we stay within the fold and work through this.

Those marks may well be the scars of the crucified and risen Lord. Each one of us, by virtue of baptism, are marked as Christ's own, bearing God's image. That common bonding is our starting point. For me, I am more than content in saying aspects of all of this is a daily struggle, and one that continues to be part of my prayerful discerning.

Together, in this Parish which boasts a Church built on the foundation of the Good Shepherd being laid down, we begin again in the Church of the Resurrection. It is a fold that is broad as it is narrow. It is a place, whilst outwardly includes, understands its limitations. This Church calls to each person that comes through the doors to experience blessing: both given and received.

[And it is that context we bless and celebrate with Win and Greg today, acknowledging the journey to this moment, and all that it has been and is still to come.]

Any blessing that is given and received is called God's grace, freely given and bestowed, and yet, as mysterious and awe inspiring as ever. It is as fragrant as the oil of Chrism pouring down over Aaron's beard, as it is in the washing away of our sins in the blood of the Lamb.

In meeting Jesus here today, we know that as his body, we must move beyond the gates and also seek to bring others into the fold with us. And we only need to look at the ministry of Jesus to know exactly what that means: Gentiles, Jews, Greeks, male, female, eunuch, lame, blind, dumb, mute, prisoners, lepers, circumcised, uncircumcised, all the marginalised...for all are one in him.

Today, we thank God for the Good Shepherd. We thank God that having given its life for witness on this mountain, it has been picked up again, and with the Holy Trinity as the cornerstone of faith, continues to build upon that legacy.

May we be truly inspired in our mutual calling to do the same.