

Flocking In!

Acts 2^{42-end}; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2^{19-end}; John 10¹⁻¹⁰

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10¹⁰)

You must have noticed that we have arrived at the annual 'Sheep Sunday!' The readings and the hymns celebrate our woolly companions and the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd.

The difficulty with pursuing the 'Sheep may safely graze' approach is that we forget the purpose of sheep. Shepherds aren't officers of the RSPCA - either they are businessmen themselves or are employed by businessmen who pursue their profit by slaughtering and selling lamb or mutton! The relationship may be good - but it has a sell-by date!

Forgive me, then, if I don't engage in woolly thinking this morning, but focus instead on that one phrase of Jesus: **I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.**

I am not sure that this verse was in the Bibles read in the Churches of the North East of Scotland where I grew up! The idea that a Christian life was fulfilling, enjoyable and positive was certainly never preached from any pulpit. The Christianity of my youth is summed up very well in the story of a young lad moving from the Highlands to London.

A young man secured a job in London and, when he told his mother she said, "Jock, when you get to that big evil city with all its temptations, remember your good Scot's Presbyterian principles." When he told his father, his father said, "Jock, when you get to that big evil city with all its temptations, remember your good Scot's Presbyterian principles." On the day before he was to leave the Minister from the Kirk came to see Jock and said, "When you get to that big evil city with all its temptations, remember your good Scot's Presbyterian principles." The lad plucked up courage and said to the minister, "Will my good Scot's Presbyterian principles protect me from the evils of the city?" And the minister paused and thought and then said, "No, but they will stop you enjoying them!"

Christianity that doesn't make you smile and cannot make you laugh has very little to do with Jesus! Sin *IS* forgiven. Guilt *IS* removed! Enjoy the fact!

The way in which Christians can pursue that life together is then described in Acts as Peter, at the end of his Pentecost sermon, states what a Christian community should be like:

- ✦ **Teaching, fellowship and breaking of bread** and to **prayers** - this is what distinguishes a Church from a social club: we learn about Jesus; we live Jesus' life; and we share Jesus together.
- ✦ **All who believed were together and had all things in common** - Christians may own 'things' but 'things' don't own them: God provides for all our needs and the only difficulty is that the resources for the Church and its people too often remain locked up in the bank accounts of Christian people.
- ✦ **Day by day the spent much time together** - this might be in the **temple** or in their **homes** but the notion of regular worshippers being once a month (as it is now described by the Church of England) isn't what is described here; they spent enough time together to know each other; they knew each other well enough to love each other; they loved each other so deeply that they had the **goodwill of all the people**. (The challenge is to become a Church like this without becoming a clique - there always has to be room for more!)
- ✦ **Day by day the Lord added to their number** - that happened when people told others about the Risen Christ: God is the same; the message is the same; are we?

If we really do want people to flock in we have to ensure that coming to Church doesn't feel like it has all the joy of sheep entering an abattoir.

We work at the basics - of being communities celebrating Jesus and enjoying one another: the rest we leave to God and to prayer.