

Sheep Sunday!

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]*

If we had been able to have all our readings today, we would have read the 23rd Psalm. Together with the reading from John's Gospel, it gives this Sunday the nick-name of 'Sheep Sunday!' Anyone who had attended St Catherine's in Burbage when the individualistic Rob Atkins was organist cannot help but remember his special contribution to this Sunday - 'Sheep May Safely Graze' by JS Bach with the theme replaced with 'Bah Bah Black Sheep!' It made us all smile!

One of the ways I do believe that I have grown as a Christian is that I enjoy life; I laugh; I smile. It wasn't the faith that I was brought up in - that was a very serious and miserable affair. There was little fulfilment of Jesus words: **I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**

I am convinced that Jesus would have been great company and the evidence is there in the Gospels that he and the disciples would have laughed a great deal.

Even in lock-down, it is possible to have **abundant life**:

✠ There have been lots of attempts to come up with po-faced interpretations of Jesus saying, **I am the gate of the sheep** (of the gate being interpreted as a gate-keeper; or that the gate was in fact a human slave who lay across the opening to fill the gap; etc). Surely the idea of the agent of the creation of world pivoting on hinges is an expression of the sense of fun. What matters is the securing of being enfolded in Christ and the security that brings. Being secure in God in Christ gives us the firm foundation for abundant life.

✠ In the reading from Acts we find a community who, out from the foundation of their faith, build something positive. We can't like them - for the time being - spend **much time together**, but we can learn from them. They enjoyed each other so much that they **had all things in common.**

Their approach to life was positive - **they had glad and generous hearts.** Such was their reputation that they had the **goodwill of all the people.** All of that grew out of the joy in their faith and an adherence to the blue-print of a happy and successful Church: **They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

Faith, as it is gifted to us by Jesus, is a joyful, liberating, cheerful and positive thing. It gives us hope in any situation; confidence to face whatever may happen; it makes us better people; it makes us laugh and smile!