

St Edmundsbury Cathedral
3rd May 2020
Eucharist Online
Acts 2.42-end, 1 Peter 2. 19-end, John 10.1-10
“Liminality of Life in Lockdown”

I wonder what today's headlines are telling you?

The Fourth Sunday of Easter. Good Shepherd Sunday. Christ, our shepherd, our provider... the one with the familiar voice, who rescues and protects us from harm...

and alongside those headlines, perhaps images of a sheepfold ... ancient sheepfolds scattered across the hills, providing refuge on the journey, stone-walled enclosures with a narrow opening, bridging the gap... the place where the shepherd would lay himself down for the sheep.

Or those sheepfolds nearer to villages and communities... places of rest, retreat and healing for the sheep, the door opened only to the shepherd, that shepherd being already so well-known to the gatekeeper.

Welcome to my present 'sheepfold', my place of refuge. *[picture my front door]*

This is the door that keeps me safely inside, ensuring the outside cannot come in.

That's the deal. If I and my family stay home.

We protect one another. We protect you. We protect us.

Six weeks ago, this 'sheepfold' was, for me, a place of refuge. *[picture of Cathedral]*

Perhaps you know a similar place?

This was the place where the sheep gathered together.

A place of retreat, rest-oration and 'restaurer'-tion that helped to bring healing and wholeness.

This is the door that keeps me out. *[picture of Cathedral front door]*

I wonder how wholehearted I might have been had I truly understood that being sent out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to God's praise and glory would, on that particular day, would really lead to no going back...

Throughout our lives, perhaps there have been times when we have found our refuge in a book, or a hobby... perhaps in the company of friends. Or in special places... up in the mountains... under the vast Suffolk night sky... finding solace in a vast coastline. Places of refuge are important. For those whose homes are not safe... a place of refuge might be internal, holding on to the possibility of a better day or... running to the nearest foodbank or hostel. At certain times in our lives it might simply be a question of surviving, muddling through, one day at a time. Finding a place of refuge is everything. And necessary.

Yet what sheep dreams of living a life penned-in? Finding refuge is part of the journey, not the destination. Yes, the sheepfold might help us to feel safe, keeping us away from all that might harm us... all that might steal from us our joy, our hope and our capacity to love and to be loved... providing protection from “thieves and bandits”, from ‘opportunistic soul seducers’ to quote Clement of Alexandria.

But what kind of life is that? How is that a life well-lived when there are green pastures to explore, still waters to be discovered, a table spread before us and our cup to be filled to overflowing. Yet even there, amidst the green and pleasant land outside we are vulnerable, the shepherd searching for the lost sheep... all those twists and turns through which unexpected, unforeseen and unsolicited dangers undoubtedly lurk.

“I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly.”

So where is abundant life to be found?

Abundant life in Christ is not about doing a deal to secure a place in the fold... finding surety of health and wealth and happiness.

Neither is abundant life in Christ about being on the inside... or the outside...

positioning ourselves on the right side

or even about taking sides at all, as though heaven is the ultimate refuge from life itself.

For us mortals, abundant life will never be about controlling life and conquering death... but experiencing life and death and the realisation of eternal life with and through the risen Christ who has lived-life fully, understands what it is to walk through death’s valley. For the good shepherd is with us, always. In both the freedom and apparent danger of the hills. In both the confinement and perceived safety of the sheepfold. Wherever and however we are, we are always in the presence of God.

It’s ironic that we so often fail to notice this, given that today’s Gospel is sandwiched between stories of people receiving the gift of sight.

I wonder if abundant life becomes most visible in life’s transitions, as we move in, out and between sheepfold and pasture... for at the threshold of our every going out and our every coming in we encounter Christ ... the gate... opportunities to pause and reflect and be guided by the voice of the shepherd

- As we move from day to night to the dawn of a new day...
- we make one decision and then another... drifting from one conversation to the next
- Riding the rollercoaster of life’s headlines... for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health
- younger and older, past and future
- from life through death to the full realisation of life eternal.

Abundant life is found in liminal living. Liminal, meaning threshold... in the place of transition... where the threshold between the visible world of matter and the invisible world of spirit are woven together, not two worlds but one. We belong to both, here and now. And the closer we are to our own mortality the greater our awareness of this. Richard Rohr writes "When we find ourselves in liminal space, does it matter whether we are pushed or whether we jump? Either way, we are not where or what we were before, nor do we know how or where we will land."

I am the gate... the one whose presence is most felt in liminality.

I, we have no idea what life will look like tomorrow.

But as we transition to a different kind of living it is in the transition that we discover in Christ what it is to live abundantly.

For sure, there's no going back.

For some it's a good time to practice prayer.

I will shortly finish by sharing with you, Mary Oliver's poem, "Praying" [from her book, *Thirst*], but first, a challenge...

I dare you. I dare you to sit prayerfully in the silence.

I dare you to endure the discomfort of liminality this week.

I dare you to gift and be gifted life abundant

as you follow the voice of the shepherd,

the guardian of your soul.

*It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch*

*a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway*

*into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.*

Revd Sarah Geileskey

Cathedral Curate