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Dear Friends

"I came so you may have life in abundance – I am the Good Shepherd"
John 10 v 11-18 & Psalm 23

I have to say I have never been a big fan of television. I have one TV of which its only function is to gather dust, but through marriage I have now inherited another three! But I do enjoy a good film or drama from time to time, and I have to confess I am currently totally hooked on the BBC series *Line of Duty*, a drama depicting the life of an anticorruption police unit. It is fast paced, hard hitting, gripping viewing and, I will warn you, not for the faint hearted. Every week the plot thickens and every week there is a justification that all actions were taken in order to preserve life in the line of duty.

As the title suggests, there is a duty to protect life, a duty of care – something which is echoed in the health, social, political, and legal arenas. I have always been fascinated by the term 'duty of care'. In fact, everyone has a duty to care, a responsibility to protect others and ourselves. We currently exercise this by continuing to socially distance and wearing masks regardless of vaccination status.

Today we hear from the gospel according to John, written for the early Christian communities, communities who may have lived in a context different from our own but whose questions remain the same. How are we to live? How can we live well together? Life is precious indeed and earthly life can be cut short as we have been reminded over this last year.

We are invited to consider Jesus as the good Shepherd, a motif with which most people are familiar. The good Shepherd is the one we can trust, the one whom we enter into relationship with and offers us a model of how our relationships should be with each other and our world. Just like us, the Shepherd has a duty to care for his sheep. My husband Simon lived in rural north Wales and I spent time watching the sheep in the field adjacent to the house. Many people would enter the field to access a public footpath and the sheep didn't bat an eyelid, but as soon as the farmer entered they would gather around and follow him. There was clearly a special relationship between them; one of trust.



Jesus the Good Shepherd is an example of how God cares for his people, leading gently out of compassion, not forcefully through selfish gain, protecting, nurturing, feeding and sustaining them. There will always be hired hands and wolves who will interfere but the sheep who dwell in the presence of the Shepherd – he who guards their going in and their coming out – will be brought to live life to the fullest, to live life abundantly.

I wonder. What does it mean to you to 'live life abundantly'? It suggests to me that it is about more than preserving life. Many of us have the care of others entrusted to us and the Shepherd is an example of how we care for others and take responsibility for each other. Living abundantly goes beyond a duty of care; it is about a desire for compassion, justice, peace and love, and to act accordingly. It is about the richness of relationships and friendships; it is about our connectedness with each other; it is about the fullness of life here and now as well as in the future.

Most people have heard Psalm 23 read at funerals, where we entrust to God's care loved ones departed. The Psalm speaks into the demands of life, the wilderness, the shadows, the troubles, emptiness, loss and grief but, in the presence of the Shepherd, there is the promise of green pastures, stillness, restoration and peace. A reminder that we are all under God's care. There are times in life when our cup may be half empty or half full, and times when it overflows

Of course we all recognise Jesus as the Good Shepherd and ourselves as the sheep, but I am sure there are times when you are invited to be a Shepherd and when you are invited to be a sheep. There are times when you can offer support and guidance and times when you need that yourselves.

It is through our relationships that we find life in abundance, where we walk into the fullness of our own life and into the lives of others. When we do so we look to this example. We can share in that same compassion that the Shepherd has for his sheep and this, as John tells us, is for all people and where all will have life in abundance.

Love in Christ

Belinda



Belinda & Simon's wedding