

THE GOOD SHEPHERD
Psalm 23; John 10:11-18

The Palestinian Shepherd

From *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*
by George Adam Smith

George Adam Smith was, amongst other things, a Free Church minister in Aberdeen; then Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Glasgow University; in 1891 he toured Palestine and out of that trip wrote a book which became a classic in its time. The book still gives insight into the Bible by helping the reader understand the people and places in which the stories were set. Here is his fabulous description of the Palestinian shepherd:

“Judea offers as good ground as there is in the East for observing the grandeur of the shepherd’s character. On the boundless Eastern pasture, so different from the narrow meadows and dyked hillsides with which we are familiar, the shepherd is indispensable. With us sheep are often left to themselves; I do not remember to have seen in the East a flock without a shepherd.... On some high moor, across which at night hyenas howl, when you meet him, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, armed, leaning on his staff, and looking out over his scattered sheep, every one on his heart, you understand why the shepherd of Judea sprang to the front in his people’s history; why they gave his name to their king, and made him the symbol of God; why Christ took him as the type of His self-sacrifice.”

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Earlier in the service, the children painted a poster which revealed the words “Jesus – the good shepherd”. They were wonderfully colourful, if the paint was still a bit wet!

Do you know what a shepherd does? How does he do that today? What does he have? He has a dog, fields and fences, a quad bike, a bag of feed, a crook and a cloth cap! He cares for the sheep: he has to go out in winter to feed the sheep, in the wind and rain; he has to get up in the middle of the night when its lambing time to make sure the lambs are born safely. His job is to care for the sheep, to make sure that they have enough to eat and drink, that they are safe from danger, that nobody steals them! The only difference from the shepherd in the Bible, he had no dog, and no quad bike; the shepherd went everywhere with his sheep, he never left them.

There are five words that are important today: *The Lord is my shepherd* – these are words that have helped people of faith for centuries, words that have led people to believe and trust God; words that are so important for us too! These are words that Christians have sung in all kinds of ways: there is the famous tune *Crimond*, or the new version we were singing this morning; or *The King of Love my shepherd is*; these words make our hearts glad. There are three things to know today:

1. The Lord... who are we talking about? The great God who made the stars; do you know the names of any stars? God knows them all; He made them! He made everything. He is the great, indescribable God, who is so great, big, and powerful, the One who has lived forever and will never fade away, who is bigger and greater than anything we can ever imagine. God is great!

2. My Shepherd – this God cares for us. He cares for me and you, He knows each one of us by name, He knows what you like and don't like, He knows what you're good at, what makes you happy and sad; He goes with us everywhere we go. Psalm 23 describes God who gives us everything we need just like the shepherd: He gives us food to eat, water to drink, time to rest, He guides us when we have choices to make; even when we're sad and walk through dark valleys, dangerous places in life, God is there with us too! What makes you afraid? The dentist makes me afraid! My knuckles go white as soon as I go in! God knows that too and will give us peace. God does not just care for us (that's not enough!) but He promises to bless us and the Psalm gives us the picture of a great feast to show how much God bless us: "*Surely...*" (Psalm 23:6)

3. The Good Shepherd – Jesus talks about Himself "*I am...*" (Jn 10:11) He knows us and He knows what we need and He loves us so much that He gave His life for us. There are times when we love God really well, and there are times when we wander off and get lost and Jesus loves us in all of these times; He comes looking for us. His love for us never ends, never changes, never fades away. The cross shows us how great is His love! There are times when we make mistakes and get things wrong and Jesus loves us and forgives us; there are times when life is hard for us and Jesus helps us deal with the difficult things in our lives. He saves us completely and He did that by dying on a cross for us and rising again.

There are five words to remember, one for each finger. Remember these words. Take your picture home and decorate it some more; remember Jesus' love for us. Take your bookmark home: decorate it, be creative and use it to remember Jesus love for us or give it away to someone else. When life is hard at school, at work, at home; when you have choices to make; when you feel unloved; when you make mistake and get things wrong; when you fall out with your best friend; when someone you love dies; when you're ill or in hospital; in anything and everything, here are five words to remember, one for each finger: *The Lord is my shepherd!*