Texts: Psalm 23: 1-6 & John 10: 14-16

Theme: “The Other Sheep”

In the OT God is constantly referred to as the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. For the Jewish people in OT times, God was their God. God was their shepherd. God was their commander-in-chief. At the same time, we see in the OT that even though Israel was God’s chosen nation and the Jews God’s chosen people, God never viewed the other nations and people groups as anything other than God’s people. Amos 9:7

“Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?” declares the LORD. “Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir? Throughout the OT God never ceases to remind the Israelites over and over again that He has other sheep that were not of the Jewish sheepfold.

Similarly Jesus declares in John 10 that he is the Good Shepherd, who, in contrast to the hired shepherd, is prepared to lay down his life for his sheep. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus declares:

“I know my sheep, and my sheep know me.” The Good Shepherd knows the innermost joys and struggles of his sheep. He knows us by name. In fact he knows the number of hair on our head! The sheep, in turn, know their shepherd that they recognize and respond to his voice! ILL of how shepherds called out to their flock in OT times in Israel and the sheep recognized their voice and followed.
Jesus goes on to declare in vrs 16 that “I have other sheep that are not of this fold”. Sometimes, we too, like the Jews of OT times, like to think that Jesus is our shepherd and we are the only sheep! It is very instructive that Jesus’ addressees in this instance were the Pharisees. The sect of Judaism that saw themselves as the gatekeepers of God’s salvation plan, the self-righteous, the only sheep. It was to them that Jesus announced, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold”.

As to who exactly these “other sheep” were, was still fuzzy in the minds of the disciples. One would have thought this was unambiguously made clear at the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit empowered Aramaic speaking disciples to declare the works and wonders of God to a multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-national gathering in their own different tongues, sending a clear message that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was meant for persons beyond the borders of Israel and the Jewish people. It was destined to be preached to all nations, all peoples!

But the disciples still missed the point! So that when Cornelius sent for Peter, he didn’t want to have anything to do with Gentiles, because he considered them to be unclean. It was only after God literally kicked Peter out of his prejudices in three visions, not one, that he reluctantly answered Cornelius’ call. Upon arrival and hearing Cornelius’ story, Peter then declared: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right (Acts 10:34-35).” Even then, it took the single-mindedness of the Apostle Paul to shake-up the early Church under the leadership of James and Peter, to come to the realization that Christ has other sheep outside the Jewish sheepfold. And it didn’t take long for the “other sheep” to swamp the fold!
Kwame Bediako: “The very first disciples who gathered around our Lord Jesus and were constituted into the faith community on the Day of Pentecost were all, with only a few exceptions, Jews... Yet by the time that the last apostle was dying in the late first century, the majority of the followers of Christ were from a Hellenistic background. Whatever one thought of the immoral Corinthians or the fickle Galatians or the unstable Colossians in the pages of the New Testament, they were the future.”

If the disciples and apostles were unsure of the other sheep, Jesus wasn’t. Jesus did not say, there may be other sheep out there, I’m going to look for other sheep, or prepare in case other sheep decide to join the fold. He was emphatic: **I HAVE OTHER SHEEP**! Remember Jesus knows his sheep. These sheep belong to the Shepherd even though they are outside the pen. They too belong to the fold and must be brought into the pen. Irrespective of what the sheep already inside the pen may think or say about those outside, the latter belong to the fold and have a place inside the pen. They are the “other sheep” because they are different. They speak a different tongue, in different accents, have different cultures, eat different foods, wear different cloths, think and behave differently from us. But they are the Lord’s sheep and belong inside the pen! The question for us is: Who are the “other sheep” in Davidson?

They must be brought inside the pen. ILL: **Growing up in northern Ghana, my father and his vigilance in making sure not a single animal is left outside the pen** When I read Jesus say “I must bring them also”, I hear the urgency in the voice of my father echoed in Jesus calling for the other sheep to be brought into the security and comfort of the shelter, to shield them from elements of the weather, and from predators and thieves. It was the same urgency that the
Apostle Paul heard when he declared himself the Apostle to the Gentiles; it was the same urgency that William Carey heard back in the late 18th century when he declared “Expect Great things from God. Attempt Great things for God” and headed off to India to spend the rest of his life; it was the same urgency that David Livingstone heard in the 19th century when he spent 30yrs in southern Africa, fighting against Arab slave traders and white colonial land grabbers. In fact, John 10:16 is inscribed on Livingstone tombstone in Westminster Abbey. For Livingstone, Africans were the “other sheep”, they were God’s sheep!

It is the same urgency Jesus expects from us during this mission focus month in the face of steady decline in church membership and attendance. The church is a pen for the comfort and security of the Lord’s sheep. We need to ask ourselves whether the sheep outside the pen now, or those leaving, may have a good reason for not wanting to come or remain inside. It is a sad fact that instead of being the place for security, healing and comfort, in many places and many instances, the church is the place where many people sustain their deepest wounds and lasting scars. The church inflicts rather than relieves pain. **ILL Conversation with Martin in Beirut**

Just like Peter needed deliverance from is prejudices before he could accept Cornelius and his family into the fold, so does it is that, in many cases, a lot of work needs to be done to improve conditions inside the pen for those inside to want to stay and for those outside to want to join.

The sheep outside the pen need to listen to the voice of the Shepherd. And to listen to the voice of the Shepherd, they have to be part of the fold, to be inside the pen. There are as many voices as there are many hired, bad or false shepherds out there. Sometimes, one wonders whether many are leaving the shelter of the church because they are hearing voices other than
that of the Good Shepherd; or may be there is just too much clutter, programs, busy-ness, politics inside the pen that the sheep cannot hear the Shepherd’s voice?

Having said that, the church remains the one and only place with the potential and prospects to offer true peace to a troubled world, true fellowship to a broken humanity, true healing to a hurting society. The church can be compared to the body of Jesus hanging on the cross. It may be battered, broken and bleeding. But as the Body of Christ, the church still reflects and radiates the glory, grace and love of God. So let us rise up to the task. And let us make every effort to make the pen a more hospitable place for the sheep inside and a welcoming place to those outside, so that there can be one flock and one shepherd, for that is the wish of the Good Shepherd! GOD BLESS YOU ALL!