



# 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

21<sup>st</sup> April 2024

Well greetings all, it's so encouraging to me to be here today as we come together to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter.

Our readings today, could be deeply challenging to us all.

Christian mission has sometimes been done as though determined to prove that we are right and everyone else is wrong, whereas all of today's writers think that Christians must preach and show Jesus Christ because that is actually how the world is!

In today's rather long message, I would like include some reflections and comments I have collected from my Kairos Inside prison experiences, so as to reinforce what the authors of today's readings are saying to us. Let us pray,

*Heavenly Father, we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.*

*Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

In Acts, Peter and John have been arrested, after they have healed a lame man and then preached to the crowds that gathered.

Whatever the supposed reason for their arrest, the question that the religious authorities ask really what it boils down to, *'How did you do it, and whose side are you on?'*

There is only one name, Peter says, that connects heaven and earth, that expresses the way in which God relates to us, and that assures us of God's powerful and saving love for us: Jesus.

When we look at this claim, in the light of today's other two reading, the strong impression emerges that Christians *can only make these claims about Christ by living them!*

And that truth resonates with me, the connection to Kairos Prison Ministry and the immeasurable blessings that flow from Christian Community in action!

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus describes ministry as that of the shepherd. This metaphor is one that has inspired countless sermons and pictures.

But that begs the question. Have we ever seen a picture where the frightened sheep have our human faces, watching our shepherd, Jesus, fighting off a pack of wolves?

We know that our human instinct is to run, scatter, and thereby make ourselves easier targets for being picked off by the wolves!

The shepherd (Jesus) is fighting, desperately, *to keep us together, to keep the whole flock safe!*

It is only our trust in him that enables us to stay there, shivering maybe, but together!

Even so, every so often one of us makes a panicky break for it, but then the well-loved voice of the shepherd calls that one by name and brings it back to its senses!

*Love, cost and purpose* are the themes of the description that Jesus highlights, but **purpose** is the one that often gets left out by many.

'One flock, one shepherd', Jesus says, that's the goal. The flock will come really to know the voice of Jesus, which is also the voice and the love of God. Again, this is what the Kairos community builds on both sides of the 'barb wire fence'.

The sheep come to know the voice of the shepherd because it is the voice that they have learned to associate with *care, safety, warmth, food*.

In a crisis they will trust the shepherd because he has proved himself trustworthy before, in providing for their basic needs.

The sheep would not have come to trust the shepherd if he had come out and given them a sermon a day!

His voice would not be the one they loved and believed if they had not experienced it first as the voice of practical care. To demonstrate this the following is from a letter written by an inmate to the community of Kairos 20 Cessnock,

*First of all, I just want to say, "God loves each and every one of you".*

*I want to thank our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for making Kairos 20 possible.*

*I speak on behalf of every inmate, how much we appreciate all the love, time and effort you all put in this Kairos to make us feel loved.*

*I want to thank all the caterers for all the wonderful food that was prepared for us, trust me when I say it was delicious.*

*I want to thank everyone who shared their touching testimonies, I'm sure it touched every single one of us individually. I have found a new, loving, wonderful Kairos family, which I will never forget, and be in our heart forever.*

*Thank you for having the time and patience to share with us and for listening to us. We are all privileged, humble and grateful to have met such people in Christ, like yourself.*

*To all the helpers, I want to personally thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule, for helping and making this all possible. So thank you.*

*To all my brothers in Cessnock Kairos 20, I want to thank you all for participating in Kairos.*

*I believe you didn't come here by mistake, God called you to come to Kairos. I hope and pray that a seed has been planted in your heart and you grab God's word and love with both hands and continue on God's wonderful journey, because when you're in gaol, feeling down and out, you know that there will be one person you can turn to and trust – God. I hope you can spread the wonderful word of God to everyone you know. I will always keep you all in my prayers and remember, whatever you have done, God forgives and God loves you unconditionally.*

*Finally to my host, you welcomed me with open arms and made me realise that through my trials and tribulations, God is still there for me. I pray I can love God as much as you do, you are a perfect example of how we should act in the world of the Lord. So, thank you for everything, I know I have a brother in Christ for life.*

*Thank you everybody and remember God loves each and every one of us. thank you,*

This letter, I've just read, is certainly the point made in 1 John 3:18. *'Let us love not in word or speech but in truth and action'* the letter urges.

The words are the easy bit. They cost the speaker very little, and equally they yield very little.

The sheep wander off, unfed and unprotected, because they do not recognize this unfamiliar voice. It has never done anything for them.

Christian shepherds like Jesus, have to build up the trust of the sheep, and be prepared to redeem it at great personal cost, if necessary.

This comment from the prison Chaplain reinforces the above, and I quote:

*Dear Friend's*

*Today's journey program is the sixth since I arrived at St Heliers Correctional Centre in August 2106.*

*From the outset I have been supportive of the Kairos program as it is a Christian program that allows a Christian Community to form. It brings mature men and women of faith into a correctional centre as leaven from which friendships can develop and grow. It helps people feel important and remember that they are not forgotten.*

*There is no denying that some just attend for the food and the distraction from the jail's normal routine. But the grace of God allows something greater to develop.*

*Kairos at St Heliers is unique in a couple of ways, it operates in reverse order with the Journey before the Short Course and with women as an essential part of the team. Some men describe talking with the women as like talking to their mum or their grandmother – its refreshing and a valued opportunity.*

*This uniqueness has allowed Kairos to thrive and it is the men at St. Heliers who benefit - I commend Kairos to any man or woman of faith who wants to do something a little out of their comfort zone.*

*The relationships that form between team members and inmates are amazing – the loudest inmate befriends the quietest team member. When Mulga Bill, came off his bike everyone was concerned for his health and recovery, every month they needed an update on his progress. In the past six months the Kairos team has touched the lives of 52 men at St. Heliers Correctional Centre. Signed Rev .....*

We have to live in the world as though we really do believe that Jesus, the good shepherd who lays down his life to save us, is the way to God.

We have to live together, one flock with one shepherd, as though we know that this is what we are made for.

Any other way of living is out of tune with the whole purpose of God's creation.

Aren't we truly blessed, that the voice of the good shepherd, is still heard in the Holy Spirit, since we all still need to learn to be shepherds ourselves. **AMEN**