

10.30 a.m. – Cathedral - Trinity 3 - 16th June 2024. (first Sunday back in the Cathedral after reordering work)

John 10: 22-30

I am sure that we are all delighted to be back inside this building, which resonates with us in different ways and on different levels, but is special to this congregation and to this diocese and I am sure that even those who are visitors with us today can detect the joy with which our move back - which is also a move on - has engendered. Events such as today, though a low-key soft re-opening of the cathedral, remain in the memory for a long time, because this is the moment of contrast, which has been devised liturgically to imprint itself on us by starting today's service in the Corrin Hall and making the move back to the cathedral in a very distinct way, by readings and actions and music that fits the occasion. In so doing we raise the importance of the occasion, give thanks for the work and those who have provided the resources and pored over the plans, and, of course, remembering what the temporary arrangements of the last few months have meant to the whole ministry and operation of the cathedral community and particularly for Dean Nigel and those who most immediately support him in his role and office. So we shall look back on this day for a long time to come, and think on it when an official and grand re-opening service takes place later. This is quite normal, and we can think of similar things from the past both here and in different contexts.

When trying to remember something that happened a long time ago, perhaps with other people, perhaps alone, you may start by recalling something to do with what you usually notice. For someone it may be what clothes you and others were wearing, or it might be what the

weather was like, or possibly what you chose from the menu at the restaurant, or who you met by chance in the street or whether it was the same day as some important sporting feat or news event. Detail, sometimes quite incidental detail, seems to stick in our minds and it may help us to recall other things, then, a brief reminder from some friend or family member may be enough to bring back a whole occasion to the memory. A line in a diary can describe what we did, but may also trigger feelings that we experienced at the time, whether pleasant or otherwise.

The detail at the beginning of the Gospel account for today has St John reaching into his remembrance and teasing the memory of others. We are told that it was the Feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem, which was a mid-winter festival, but in case we didn't know we are also told that it was mid-winter, and that Jesus was walking in the Temple, in fact more precisely than that, he was walking in the portico of Solomon. This is an unusually detailed description of the time and place of the event that John was about to unfold. In all sorts of situations in which we find ourselves it is detail that makes us think more deeply about it and which helps us to recall the occurrence later. It also lies at the heart of relationships between people; the knowledge gained over years of friendship and regular meeting, and the careful and respectful use of that knowledge allow us to relate closely to one another, even if we are far apart in other ways, such as living in different parts of the world or having quite different views or interests. The opposite is also true, as families can divide and brothers and sisters become like strangers to one another, parents disown their children or children neglect and disregard their parents.

It is not insignificant that this should also be the case between and within Churches. Parishes and congregations are most of the time places where individuals find mutual support and comfort in time of need; they can also occasionally be places of tension and disagreement. This is a well-known fact which occurs, I believe, because of the deep and important significance of what we claim to be, a loving, worshipping, supportive community, that looks outwards to the world in mission and compassion, and inwards to the secret places of our hearts - to fulfil the most demanding questions of our lives. How we relate to God and to one another; how we share in the redemptive work of Christ as sinners in need of mercy and forgiveness; how death and new life are experienced spiritually and physically; and how the working of the Holy Spirit within us transforms what we are into what God has always intended us to be.

The detail with which today's Gospel begins, was a prelude to our Lord's teaching on the substance of this reading, namely the discussion and reaction to the declaration by Jesus (made earlier in chapter 10) that he is the Good Shepherd, and that he cares deeply for his sheep, who will not be lost from his hand. The concept of Shepherd in our Christian consciousness is a common one and easy to understand, and our feeling of not be able to be lost or in any way abandoned is critical to our concept of a God who loves us to the limit, even to death on the cross. As we move beyond the superficial to the heart of our life as people of the Good News of Jesus Christ, so the fold of the Good Shepherd and the character of our commitment to one another must be strengthened. In this we rejoice, but in this too we face the need to grow closer in understanding and in the detailed knowing, that draws us beyond the social convention of unity into that which reflects an inner certainty that

Christ is calling us to oneness in his flock. Together we share in the hopes of eternal life, together we listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd of our souls, together we are held secure and together we are ready to respond to the calling to be and do what has been prepared for us.

This is the message I leave with you on this day of celebration, hope and vision for the future. It may be a gentler and more passive message than some, but it is the basis of our hope, and strengthens our commitment, for as sheep of one flock and one shepherd we have the springboard to do great things, achieve a vision - however that is articulated - for a cathedral that is central to all that this diocese and parish seeks to work towards in the months and years that lie ahead. Great things have been achieved under Dean Nigel, and the whole reordering and development team, as with the music under Peter, and, as is always the case, there is much still to be done, but as one flock and guided by the Good Shepherd, even Christ himself, united around his table, sent forth as his disciples and servants, we are in the best possible way to take the steps to new challenges, fresh endeavours and the praise that comes from “New every morning is the Love, our wakening and uprising prove, through sleep and darkness safely brought, restored to life, and power and thought”. Quietly and determinedly, let that be our prayer and intent, on this new beginning today - and every day.