

The I AM sayings. John 10:11-18. I am the Good Shepherd. 27.6.2010



What comes to mind when we think of a good shepherd?

Compared to the 1st Century, shepherds today might even be thought of as having it easy.

There are all sorts of aids available to make the job relatively straightforward including drones.



Most shepherds at least have access to a farm bike, or even a quad bike, sheep dogs and the wonderful inventions of barbed wire and modern steel gates to keep the sheep safe when unattended.

If it rains the shepherd is usually protected by waterproof gear and can always leave the sheep to it and seek shelter.

In the unlikely event of a rogue dog worrying the sheep there is always a rifle somewhere handy.

The shepherd often returns to the farmhouse for a comfortable night's sleep and is often paid above the minimum rate for unskilled workers. While Jesus is clear enough in likening himself to the good shepherd, religious art has not helped much with the image.



You might remember a picture of a man clearly European with a beard and a kind expression, wearing a shining white cloak carrying a little lamb in his arms while other lambs gambolled at his feet.

That doesn't square with my picture of a shepherd of either today or of Jesus' Time. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The good shepherd was a tough and courageous person. Hardly gentle Jesus meek and mild.



As we heard last week there would be sheep folds built for communal use, a roughly circular stone wall with a gap to let in the sheep for the night. To stop the sheep wandering out, the shepherd would simply lie across the gap becoming the gate. If the shepherd was any good the sheep would know his voice, which would be very handy if more than one shepherd had two or more flocks in the enclosure. In the morning, the shepherd would call and those sheep who knew his voice would respond and follow him back to the hills where the grass grew. Dangers might well include wild dogs, hyenas, wolves, and in Jesus' day, even the occasional lion. There were also rogues prepared to use force to steal sheep. Food could be scarce.

Perhaps rather than those sweet Sunday School pictures we should be thinking of the shepherd boy David,



with his accuracy with a sling who would presumably have had his skills honed firing stones to drive off the wild animals.

The good shepherd is not so much about the loving carrying of the defenceless kid or lamb, but rather in the reaction to genuine danger.

The good shepherd then had to be prepared to put his life on the line to protect his sheep.

When danger came there would presumably be the choice either to beat a strategic retreat or to stay to fight off those who would steal his sheep. Whether they be robbers or wild animals.

The real question would be whether the shepherd would stand his ground. Not all shepherds would be good in the sense that they would put their lives on the line. As shepherds were considered amongst the lowest class in Jesus day it is probable that bad shepherds rather than good shepherds were probably the norm.

That Jesus would be numbered amongst the good in terms of personal bravery would certainly follow from the gospel accounts. He was prepared to speak against powerful authority figures. He cleared the Temple.



He faced an angry crowd in Judea who were going to stone Him. Later He returned to that same unfriendly Judea. That does not suggest a timid leader. That Jesus set his face to Jerusalem knowing that death was likely to be his lot suggests someone prepared to sacrifice his own life rather than his principles.

Jesus was also prepared to be seen caring about the untouchables in his society, the lepers, the tax-collector, the prostitute, the Samaritan woman.

The people of his day would have understood all this picture language of shepherds.

What is more difficult is transferring the image to the present. Obviously Jesus is no longer physically present. When people are in danger, Jesus does not appear from the sky like Batman.



So if he is really a protective shepherd we might well ask what Jesus means for us today when he is recorded as claiming to be the good shepherd for those who follow. I think we get a clue when we study Christians through the ages. It was Thomas, doubtful about stories of the resurrection.



Yet it was that same Thomas who courageously went to be a shepherd to the people in Southern India.

Paul, was initially suspicious of Christianity and prepared to persecute Christians. Something happened to Paul, transforming him into someone prepared, courageously, to shepherd the young Church.

There is something contagious in courage in the face of adversity and a courageous person with a message of compassion may also be seen as an expression of Christ.

I am not a Catholic, yet I see examples of the courageous good shepherd in some of the recorded lives of saints. I wonder if others will find in us some of the properties of a good shepherd.

Jesus only starts to become real for his followers when they realise that they are expected to live out his message rather than hoping others will do it for them.

“Go and see the vicar should not be the first answer to difficult questions”

I don't want to say that we shouldn't pray for people but, sometimes, we turn to prayer and leave it at that.



Prayer

*How to do nothing
and still think you're helping*

Wouldn't it be more Christ-like to reach out to those in trouble and offer real practical help? The dangers have changed but the need for good shepherds are as real as ever. Dangers such as the money lenders who prefer to be seen as providing essential social services. Modern slave traders who portray themselves as offering freedom. Politicians and church leaders who would rather set up committees to investigate issues than take action which might be inconvenient.

The church has all the symbols of wanting to be a good shepherd.



By the way the Latin for Shepherd is Pastor.
Strange that we rarely use it in the Church of
England. There are those who are prepared to
risk the dangers to be good shepherds.

We have our own Ruth and Claude in Burundi
and Sarah in India.

Sacrificing a comfortable life to work with the
poor and disadvantaged. I would like to
encourage you not just to see Jesus as a good
shepherd looking after you but to see Him as an
example, to all those who profess to follow
Him, to be good and courageous shepherds
fighting for those in need

After all it was Jesus who said to his followers
Take care of my sheep

**I am
the Good
Shepherd**



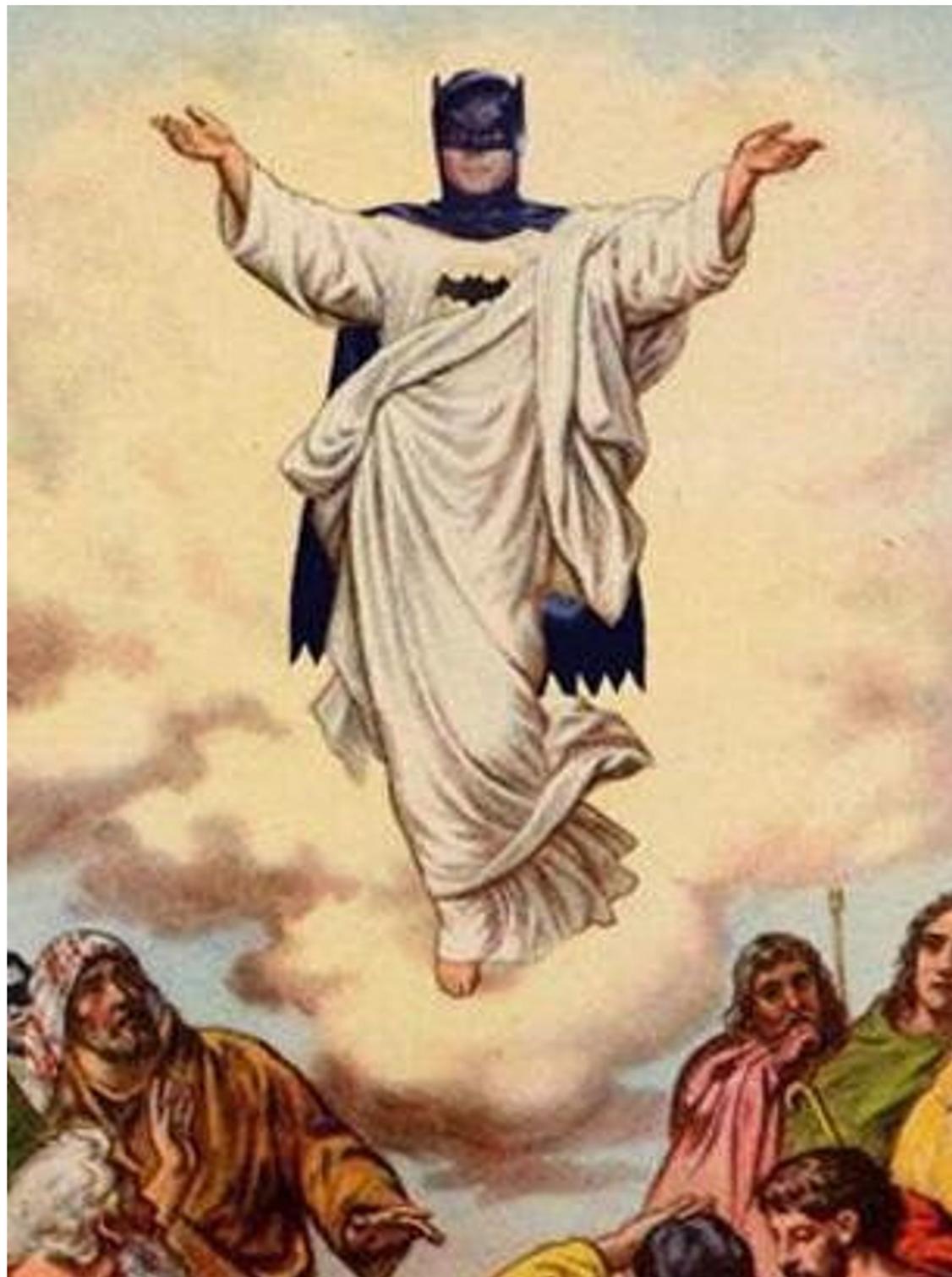














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Prayer

*How to do nothing
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RUTH & CLAUDE

BARABEREWE



“Take care of my sheep.”

