

WHO DO YOU TRUST?

Sunday 7th May 2017
John 10:1-10

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Who do you trust? A recent Roy Morgan opinion poll found nurses were the most trusted profession in Australia. I am a bit chuffed by this as my eldest daughter is a nurse in a Sydney hospital. And I am aware there are a few trained nurses in this congregation today. You are indeed a wonderful lot!

Other professions that gained high ratings included doctors, pharmacists, engineers and school teachers. Meanwhile, those professions that ranked low included bank managers, lawyers, car salesmen and politicians. Clergy or ministers of religion did poorly. Ten years ago 60 per cent of those surveyed trusted ministers. Only 35% per cent do so today!

We may laugh. However, with the shocking issue of abuse within the church and the general decline of the church across the board means the church as an institution is less trusted these days. The clergy are being significantly impacted here.

Who do you trust? Some commenters suggest the rise of Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Rodrigo Duterte and Pauline Hanson is because people no longer trust traditional politicians or established political parties. There is a credibility gap between what these parties are saying and what they believe, we are told. Hence cries go out for the “real Malcolm” or the “real Julia” to please stand up.

Here people want their leaders to say what they mean and mean what they say. One writer puts it this way: “We want to think their personal sense of integrity is more important than winning or keeping power. We can’t. And we want applaud their moral courage. Again, for the most part, we can’t”.

I think it’s reasonable to suggest we want our leaders to have integrity and to genuinely care. We yearn for our representatives to be committed to creating better communities, better education, better health care, better welfare, better economic policy, better opportunity and a better future.

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Yet in many cases the perception is that they spend too much time developing well-crafted speeches, delivering three-word-slogans and bagging their opponents.

Meanwhile the second round of the French presidential elections takes place today. We wait to see who is the winner – Emmanuel Macron, the pro-European Union ex-banker who founded his own party just last year. Or Marine Le Pen, leader of the anti-immigration and anti-European Union National Front.

Who do you trust?

Today is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday”. This is because we focus in on John chapter ten and the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Shepherds care for their sheep. They protect their sheep, particularly during the night as bandits and marauders prey on them. Shepherds also lead their sheep, they tend the flock and they keep the flock together. Here the image of the shepherd has shaped the way we understand ministry. The title “Pastor” has its origins here as does the office of Bishop whose role is symbolised in the carrying of the bishop’s crook or crozier.

In today’s reading we particularly focus on Jesus as the door or the gate to sheepfold, or the place where the sheep take refuge during the night. Here Jesus contrasts his role to thieves and bandits.

It’s worth pausing for a moment to think about what Jesus means in his reference to “thieves” and “bandits”. These are strong words. “Thieves” are those who exploit people who are vulnerable, thieves set people up, they con people and they take people for a ride.

“Bandits” plunder and pillage. They hold people to ransom often with violence and come close to what we encounter today as “terrorism”.

It’s possible, indeed it’s probable, Jesus was referring to those who were power in his day, especially the temple hierarchy in Jerusalem and the religious establishment of the day. The High Priest, Caiaphas and his religious cohorts, were in collusion with Rome while Herod Antipas, like his father, Herod the Great, was almost paranoid about maintaining some resemblance of power under a client state relationship with their Roman overlords. All of this meant the interests of Caiaphas, Herod and others in power came first. Exploitation, violence and oppression became their weapons in the struggle maintain positions of power and privilege.



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But in a broader sense, Jesus, in his reference to “thieves” and “bandits”, was probably referring to anyone who deceives, manipulates or exploits others. Jesus is, in all likelihood, is looking at those who masquerade under the banner of one thing but actually do something quite different. Here Jesus points the finger at those who put their particular interests and needs before the interests and the needs of others either subtly or with vengeance.

And this takes us closer to ‘home’ as we begin to consider that even in the closest of communities there are hidden agendas, there is a lack of transparency, there is an unwillingness to listen, there is reluctance to surrender power and there is a resistance to embrace change. Indeed, there is even the attempt to belittle, intimidate or coerce.

Whatever the “thieves” and “bandits” are for us, Jesus makes one thing very clear here. As the “door” or the “gate” to the sheepfold Jesus has only one thing in mind. And that is the protection, the care and the well-being of the flock. Moreover, as the “door” or the “gate” Jesus is the means, Jesus is the way the sheep move into the sheepfold for protection and move out to pasture where they are nurtured and sustained.

For here, Jesus exclaims that his purpose is to offer life to others - life that is truly “abundant”.

In the New Testament there are three different words for life. There is “bios” which refers to the physical body. It is from this we get the word “biology”. Then there is “psuche” which refers to the mind, the emotion and the will. It is from this we get the “psychology”. And then there is “zoe” which refers to the divine life that is gifted to us in Christ.

“Zoe” is the life referred to in John chapter one where “in the beginning...all things came into being through him.....what has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” “Zoe” is the life God intends for all of us, “zoe” a life that takes us beyond physical and the mental dimensions to offer life as God intends.



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For you see, “zoe” transcends the limitations of life as most people know it with its will to serve self-interest and its need to deceive or even exploit others. “Zoe” puts an end to all this. Life as “zoe” is not about getting one over your neighbour, pushing your luck to the disadvantage of others or, indeed, bragging about our so-called “lucky country” when so many around the world are deprived of even the most basic necessities in life. “Zoe” is what St Paul refers to as us being “in Christ”. “Zoe” is what the Good Shepherd offers to all who hear his voice.

So, who do you trust? The one who offers a “zoe” form of life, a life that is full of abundance? Or do you put your trust in those whose interests, concerns and needs focus on the preservation of self and the sustenance of one’s ego?

There are choices here. Moreover, the one who offers a “zoe” form of life does so, not out of a position of power or privilege. The one who is the “gate”, the one who through whom we are nurtured, sustained and cared, for comes not as a prince. He comes not as a politician or as a power-broker. Rather Jesus comes as a humble servant committed to others to the point of giving up his life so that we may all live.

And this, my friends, is the one who we should trust!

This morning as we gather around the Lord’s Table and we share in the Lord’s Supper, think about these things. Who do you trust? And what does that mean for you? What does that mean for this church, this community and the way we bear witness to this living Christ who is there for us now and always!

Amen.

