

St Brandon's, Sermon for 26th April 2026

Acts 2:42-end, John 10:1-10

Baptism and Calling

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'The Good Shepherd' is a well-known name for Jesus: if Deborah were standing here she would be wearing a stole with a picture of Lamby on it, her pet lamb. Jesus used the image of the good shepherd as an analogy to help his followers believe that he really was sent by God. Shepherds still do what they were doing 2,000 years ago in Jesus's day: moving sheep from place to place so they can find the pasture, be protected, and kept safe and healthy.

Only the flock's own shepherd will be allowed in by the security man on the gate, and the sheep will only willingly, eagerly, follow their own shepherd. I don't know if you have ever tried helping move sheep but if you are not the known handler, the only tactics you can use are of getting in their way and scaring them into heading away from you. The very opposite tactic to calling them by name with familiar endearments and commands. The very opposite tactic to the way the Good Shepherd, Jesus, works with his own sheep.

Jesus uses the image of the good shepherd to give his disciples confidence that they can trust and follow him because they have seen him perform the works of God and heard him speak with the authority of God, about God. They can be like sheep trusting their shepherd.

Today is designated as 'Vocations Sunday' as well as being a baptism and our Annual Parochial Church meeting, and all three are about 'calling'.

Did you notice the references to calling and shepherding that came in the baptism words?

I said,

'We all wander far from God and lose our way: Christ comes to find us and welcomes us home.'

All of us at times are like foolish sheep or reckless lambs that need to be found and brought back. All of us need Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to nudge us into doing the better things, not getting sucked into doing those things that hurt us and other people. Something inside all of us needs – longs - to be loved, secure and 'found', in some profound way; to be brought home to God. That's the bit of us listening for Jesus calling to us, calling us to follow him, and his ways.

And the next line said:

'In baptism we respond to his call'

Like sheep responding to the shepherd's nudging and calling, "Woah! That way!", steering us towards the right gate, not by panicking us, though perhaps bumping us along a bit until we are

facing the right direction. We are not scared of the shepherd, just a bit confused but once we get it, trust and follow the shepherd's directions, we are safe. Asking for baptism is like asking to be shown the right gate. It means being ready to trust, willing to follow, and we show that by responding with promises that we will turn away from sin, reject evil, and turn to Christ as saviour, trusting him as Lord.

We heard in the reading how, *'Jesus calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.'*

In baptism we are named before God, as Sophia was today, and then baptised in the name of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God knows each of us by name, and we are part of his flock. He calls us by name, calls us individually to be led out into new undertakings; as we heard in the introduction to the service, *'God calls us to fullness of life'*.

You may think that doesn't apply to you, you are only here today for Sophia's baptism but it does! Something about bringing her to be baptised being the 'right thing to do' is what is meant by this mysterious term 'calling'. It's that quality of being drawn to do something that is good and 'right', you 'just want to', and you feel warm inside at the thought.

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting which will follow this service is our version of an AGM. We hear about all the activity that has happened in the last 12 months and confirm the governance is working properly. It's the moment at which the office-holders who run the church and manage it, get elected. It's the moment, therefore, when people act on their sense of being called to offer time, skills and experience to support the church. Amazingly, each year we find there are sufficient offers to fill all the posts, and numerous volunteers picking up different duties. The meeting celebrates and thanks all who get involved in the 'doing'. These are not people who are looking for a way to fill their time, like a new hobby. Pretty well without exception they will be people who already have more than enough on their plate but – but! ... God has planted in them a sense of commitment and responsibility towards the church, and a willingness to serve. He has called them and they are following that call to lead the 'managing' and participate in the 'doing'.

Google, that fount of all knowledge, says, *'A vocation is a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career, profession, or life calling, often involving a sense of purpose to help others or serve a higher purpose. Derived from the Latin vocare (to call), it goes beyond a normal job to define a person's life work.'*

In churches, vocation has traditionally meant being called to be a priest or authorised leader, and that certainly must start with a strong calling, and a falling in love with the Good Shepherd. But that is a very specific and narrow application: we are all called by God to be as fully the person he uniquely made us, doing whatever he uniquely created us for: that is a life-long journey of discovery!

I urge you to practise that listening for the nudges and pull of God's calling on your life, so you can be led into the fullness of his plan for you.

Amen