

(Acts 9:36-43; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30)

Jesus says, 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me'. Today may be just the third Sunday after Easter and yet our gospel readings seem already to have run out of accounts of the Resurrection! Today's passage is taken from an early part of John's gospel. It takes us back to Jesus' teaching about himself: he says, 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.' So here in fact is the reality of the Resurrection, not only of Christ but of *all* God's people!

And indeed that 'Christian hope' which we all share is contained within each of today's readings. In our first reading, from Acts, it is very strongly present – in the form of Peter's raising of Tabitha. As we will recall, this account bears a striking resemblance to the raising by Jesus of the daughter of Jairus, the Jewish leader. Then, in the passage from Revelation, we were given a glimpse of God's heavenly glory, shared by and for all God's people.

So today's message really is this: that we have good reason to rejoice because eternal life – fullness of life – begins now. And, no one can ever 'earn' this gift of life, but each person is given the opportunity of choosing to receive it. 'All are welcome'! As the Lord says elsewhere, 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Therefore, choose life...'

Today is the beginning of Christian Aid Week, a key week for this excellent force for good: a week of raising not only funds but also awareness. I hope you will play your part in helping it do both.

Until recently, Christian Aid had the hard-hitting strapline, *We believe in life before death*. They do not use a strapline, a 'mission statement', now: we can take it as read that *Christian Aid* believe in eternal life – fullness of life available to all, beginning now.

Today is also Vocations Sunday. Each year, the third Sunday after Easter is kept by the worldwide Church as a day of prayer for Vocations – ordained and lay. It's a day that we all recognise the magnitude of that saying of Jesus, 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me'. Vocation is literally about hearing a call, God's personal call. May I invite you this day, and every day, to listen out for that call – that prompting – and to consider what it is that God wants you to do, or rather to be.

Remember, Jesus says, 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me'. He knows us; he wants the very best for us; he wants us to be the best we can be. When he calls us, it is so that we can become fully ourselves. And we can be assured that by his life-giving Spirit he equips those whom he calls.

So I return to my summary of today's message: that we have good reason to rejoice because eternal life – fullness of life – begins now. No one can ever 'earn' this gift of

life, but each person is given the opportunity of choosing to receive it. 'All are welcome'! And I would add, we have no need to fear. Indeed, that assurance 'do not be afraid' is the most common expression in the Bible.

So what is God calling you to do in his service, in the Church or the world; what is he calling you to be, as you grow closer to him?

I was talking the other day to our Deanery Vocations Advisor, Lindsay Southern, who is the vicar of Catterick. As well as having strong links with the Garrison she is an army wife, and she has an interesting take on how to listen out for God's call. She says that a military sniper is trained, upon hearing gunfire, to locate the source by taking three points of reference. In the same way, when we are seeking to discern God's call, we listen within, to what others are saying to us, and to what the Church is saying. If all three 'points of reference' indicate the call to be 'of God' then we should be confident in proceeding.

Remember, the Church as a whole – and not simply this church – needs its members to be active in its mission and ministry, in all kinds of roles. Remember, too, St Paul's teaching about the Body of Christ: that no one member, no one role, is more important than any other: we all depend on one another. And remember also that we need to be using our God-given time and talents in his service, in the Church and in the world: after all, this is how we can become fully ourselves.

For what it's worth, my take on how to begin listening out for God's call is to ask ourselves, 'what would I love to do, or to be'? As my spiritual director reminded me when I saw him recently, our will is often God's will.

That message again: we have good reason to rejoice because eternal life – fullness of life – begins now. No one can ever 'earn' this gift of life, but each person is given the opportunity of choosing to receive it. 'All are welcome'! And we have no need to fear. Indeed, 'do not be afraid' is the most common expression in the Bible. So, what would you love to do or to be as you grow closer to God?

Yesterday our PCC gathered for an Away Day at Marrick Priory. We looked at the goals of the new Diocesan Vision and at our own goals here at St Mary's. We needed to be sure there is a good overlap, for we are part of the Diocese and the whole can and should be greater than the sum of the parts.

We also saw that like Christian Aid we do not actually need a strapline to tell others who we are and what we are about. Our words and our actions as the parish church of Richmond with Hudswell should speak for themselves.

We considered the broad areas in which this church – you and me – need to be active: Worship and Prayer, Outreach through a balance of word and action, Discipleship and Pastoral Care, and maintaining our infrastructure (that is, our buildings, finance, and administration). We listed our immediate priorities in each of these areas – and

soon realised that we are all – you and me – going to need to be involved in achieving them!

So in my Message in the June Magazine I will be outlining these priority areas, inviting you to consider how God is calling you to play your part. And very soon, in place of a sermon, as we are gathered together to hear God's word, we might take this a bit further.

Jesus says, 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.' So, what would you love to do or to be as you grow closer to God?

'Now is eternal life'. Thanks be to God.

Amen.