

**Easter 4, 22 April 2018.**

**Acts 4, 5-12; John 10, 11-18.**

### **St Stephen's – Revd John McGrath**

Jesus says, "I have other sheep who do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one Shepherd." In Jesus time there were no sheepdogs. The Shepherd did not drive the sheep but led them from the front. The sheep knew the voice of their own Shepherd and followed him. A friend of mine gave up his business and went to be a crofter in the north-east of Scotland. He kept sheep. I once saw him call out to his sheep scattered over a hillside. The sheep all came running to him at the sound of his voice.

Jesus is the good Shepherd who calls all people to follow him in the way that leads to a right relationship with God. For sins to be forgiven and to give a new relationship with God, Jesus laid down his life. Jesus says, "no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father." Jesus did exactly as the father commanded him, even to the point of suffering and dying on the cross. After his resurrection and ascension, he gave commands to his disciples which they in turn obeyed.

In The Acts of the Apostles, we read of how Peter and John obeyed our Lord's command. They had been imprisoned then brought before the Jewish leaders. Peter and John had healed a lame man and were asked by the leaders, "By what power or what name did you do this?" Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter said plainly, 'By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.' Peter accused the Jewish leaders of rejecting Jesus and crucifying him. Then he boldly proclaimed the truth saying "salvation is in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."

How bold are you? How confident to tell others the truth of the gospel? Let me be as plainspoken as Peter. There are some in the church, including church leaders, who have rejected Jesus as the only one who can save us. They pander to a post-modern culture which denies that there can be any absolute truth. In our culture it is argued that all viewpoints are relative and there is no absolute truth. So as not to upset others, some Christians will not say that our faith is absolutely true.

It is not arrogance and I am sure it would not upset anyone if I say that  $2+2 = 4$  and not five or six. I am not being arrogant in repeating the same message as Peter and all the apostles that Jesus and only Jesus is the way that we receive salvation. Guru Nanak cannot save anyone. Gautama, the Buddha, cannot save anyone. Joseph Smith, who founded the Mormons, cannot save anyone. Mohammed, the founder of Islam, cannot save anyone. Only

Jesus can save! Peter spoke the truth when he said, "there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Maybe some have not declared the truth which Peter proclaimed for fear of causing offence. It is a lack of love to prevent people from hearing the truth. We must be bold and say that people need to receive Jesus and not to reject him. If Jesus is our Lord and not just our saviour, then we are under an obligation to obey him. Like Peter and the other apostles, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit and speak the true gospel message. Our diocesan vision speaks of making disciples, growing leaders and transforming our community. That vision can never be fulfilled if we do not believe the true gospel ourselves. That vision can never be fulfilled if, for whatever reason, we fail to tell others the truth. Jesus, our good Shepherd, is the one and only saviour of humanity.

He is the way, the truth and the life. There is no other way, no other truth and no other life that we can follow to be put right with God. God the Father so loved the world, that he sent his Son. The Son so loved the world that he sent his apostles to proclaim the truth. If we love the Lord, we must continue that work. Let us make sure that others can hear the voice of the good Shepherd, and follow Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen