

John 10:12, 16 Flock Acts 20:28-29, 1 Peter 5:2-3

In John 10 Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, which implies that we are his flock. In Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5 apostles are addressing Christian leaders as shepherds over the flock, which again suggests that the church is a flock. I should really speak about the Good Shepherd, but for today we focus on the sheep. Already in the OT this image is used for God's people, as in Isaiah 40:11, 60:7; Jeremiah 23:3; 31:10; Ezekiel 34; Micah 2:12, 5:4 and Psalm 79:13. What does this metaphor mean?

1. It points to God's tender care for us, for example in Isaiah 40:11. (These words are used in The Messiah by Handel.)
2. The Israelites saw beauty in a flock of sheep: in Song of Songs 4:1-2 the young woman is compared to a flock.
3. We may think that all sheep look the same, but research shows that sheep see differences within individuals of the same breed; and breeds of sheep look very diverse anyway. For us this means that different views are acceptable in the church. We do not have to agree on everything. For this reason the Baptist Union Declaration of Principle is very short. To handle this diversity, respect for each other is required!
4. Success is not the norm in the church. Most sheep are not particularly strong or successful. All are welcome in the sheepfold.

But the metaphor also shows some negative aspects:

1. Some of us can be wayward like sheep. We need to listen carefully to the Good Shepherd and then also to the human shepherds (pastors) that he appoints over us.
2. On the other hand, some sheep expect too much of human shepherds: 'The pastor knows it all, I don't have to think for myself.' O yes you need to! Church members should never be too passive. (In a Baptist church all are priests.)

Let's end with a few positives:

1. When a fox approaches a flock of sheep to steal a lamb, the stronger sheep form a circle around the weaker ones to protect them. This is a great example for us: let us protect our weaker members. Are you alert to the dangers of the time? How often do you sue the church's prayer diary?
2. And to return to the Good Shepherd: he goes out to find the lost sheep. Even though he still has 99, he also looks for number 100. All are valuable!

Do we seek the lost sheep? Do we feel the pain when one of us is missing? We might be in danger of losing some, so what do we do?

Baptist Union Declaration of Principle

In the sermon last week I said that a Baptist Church has room for a diversity of views on many things, because we have only a very short confession. The Declaration of Principle of our Union is also part of our own church's constitution. It reads:

"The Basis of the Baptist Union is:

1. That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.
2. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day'.
3. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world."