

Which am I?

Easter 4: Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

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This week we find ourselves wedged between a rock and a hard place. *And* it's ANZAC Day which adds another layer of complexity. But there are connections between these things and if you bear with me – I will try and join the dots. Well, actually it is more like a relational database for those geeks in the room.

Let's take it one at a time. Jesus didn't choose to save himself, he chose to die. His power was in giving in and in his resurrection. Martin Luther King based his entire protest movement on the power of resistance by giving in. Peaceful protests brought violent responses but by staying to the power of love, not hate, he felt that ultimately, they would win. (Let's not segue to BLM)

Our instincts are to keep life – but Jesus did not keep his from danger. He was dangerous because he didn't. And that is what Dr King was proposing in the civil rights movement.

Jesus laid his life down and put himself at risk for those he loved.

Putting aside colonial aggression against our first peoples – Australia as a nation has never been the aggressor in war. Yet, as a nation, we have put lives at risk for those we perceived as our neighbours. Our 'power' has been in mateship – the opposite of aggression. Our political failings have been when we have forgotten 'who is our neighbour'.¹

The Easter season robs others of their power by focusing beyond self-giving to the ultimate power of resurrection. That to die would bring greater impact; profound change and ultimate power of life to all is, frankly, an astounding concept. That we are given to rise up to a new life with the power to raise others and help them heal.

'Easter should not generate simple euphoric joy but a transformed life of shared caring.'²

All this is topsy turvy but then everything about Christianity tips things on its head. The Hero of the story died – yet lives on because of that. Everything is the opposite of what is expected.

¹ When we stopped putting money into PNG and the Pacific nations because we couldn't see a 'win' – we left them to fall into corruption and drug and gun trafficking. We left room for the Chinese government step in with infrastructure loans that have them so much debt that it bought ultimate influence.

² Easter four- The stone that was rejected, Rev Susan Lodge-Calvert

Jesus comes from ordinary people – not the grand stories of kings and Roman rulers. Jesus as leader yet not a Cohen or a Levite. Not a Priest. We'd hardly expect the next prime minister to be born to a tradie from Mudgee -much less the king of kings from a village in the Galilee.

That in both His life and death, there is the reaffirmation that God is in all of us. 'Abide in me' that is what we talked about last week. Jesus radical challenge was for us to see Him in the overlooked and rejected. This upside-down theology that saw God in the broken, the marginalised and the martyred. Where is the power in that?

The rock that the builders rejected. Reminds me of the Choir of Hard Knocks.³ A band of homeless people pulled together by Dr Jonathon Welch originally for a TV documentary. The Choir of Hard Knocks is credited with being the only group in Australian music history to have been awarded the highest accolades in the same year. These include a Logie Award for the Most Outstanding Factual Documentary TV Series in 2007 (for the ABC's 'Choir of Hard Knocks' documentary), an ARIA award for Best TV Soundtrack, Platinum ARIA award for their first CD "Songs from the TV Series" a Gold ARIA award for their second CD "Songs of Hope and Inspiration" and a coveted Helpmann Award for Most Outstanding Special Event for their sell out concerts at Sydney Opera House in 2007.

Everyone in the choir were the stones rejected by society yet they rebuilt their own lives and raised up everyone with them included and an entire Opera House.

Now let's look at the shepherd. We know from our Bible studies of the Christmas story that shepherds had a really, really low status. In fact, you could pretty look upon them as shearers were seen when I was young. The shearers I met worked hard all day, drank their wages, were not known for bathing and literally pissed their money away when they got to the big smoke. Why would God give the role of witness and proclaimers to a bunch of discredited hillbillies that preferred sheep to people?

Because that is the topsy turvy God there is – the shepherds were important carriers, not just of the news, but of the new status of *all* of humankind. Social structures were being adjusted.

³ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=the+choir+of+hard+knocks

Rev Susan Lodge-Calvert said, 'From the beginning, Christianity was a critique of religious authorities although not of Judaism itself'. Yet it became a faith that proclaimed God for all people; all colours; all genders and all faith backgrounds – a fulfillment of Isaiah.

Jesus was the stone the priests rejected and yes, he is the foundation of the church. The power behind Peter and John restoring the strength to someone's legs comes from Jesus – who clearly is not dead. *That* is what scared the togas off of the authorities.

It is no wonder the Romans wanted to cosy up to this power – or at least the perceived power. Chesterton said, "the cosiness between the church and the state is good for the state and bad for the church.' The Romans adopted Christianity as the official government religion in the 4th century.

Ultimately, we know when church and state combine - power corrupts and it was the church that was corrupted. Church history is dark when through the state it instituted horrendous deeds. Think crusades; inquisition, witch hunts. We have only to look as far as our own short history to see what part we played in the stolen generation.

Raising the image of the good shepherd is to celebrate the important role ordinary (and often unseen) people, workers, contribute to our wellbeing. It is the opposite of elitism – it celebrates 'everyman', love and work...and every human's responsibility. It calls for the ownership of everyone's wellbeing.

Who is the hired hand? Well, given that much of scripture is disguised political comment, my guess is this may be a subtle judgement on false leaders who uses the sheep for their own gain. It might have been a dig at priests who lived a fairly luxurious life but there were others. Cousar described them as those 'who feed themselves instead of their flock'. We have plenty around who still do that. ⁴

The other sheep, not in the pen, could well be our responsibility, not just our immediate neighbours but the whole Pacific, indeed the world.

It is no doubt that in this passage – the sheep prove costly. The shepherd 'lays down his life for the sheep' which is indeed what our service men and women do whenever they are asked.

⁴ Liberty University sues Jerry Falwell Jr seeking millions in damages, <https://news.yahoo.com/liberty-sues-jerry-falwell-jr-162325226.html>

Tending the sheep in this passage is not a metaphor for putting food on the table. It is a vocation given by the Father – a reason for being, and for dying.

We have come to this church from so many different paths. Our diversity is amazing and yet one thing I have learned is how comforting the 23rd psalm and the Good Shepherd passage are for almost everyone.

It could be that we hear the words that we are known and cared for. It could be the inclusion and companionship. It could be the freedom Jesus expresses in his choosing that is founded in divine will. The surprising thing is that while it is about a collective – both passages are very personal, they express a sense to each listener that He walks beside me. (you)

So it is not a question of whether we are the rock or the shepherd. In reality, we are one and we choose the other. Though we are broken we choose to be good shepherds. That means to see each other; to know and to care.

We can say, 'come to us Lord' – like the Choir of Hard Knocks, 'as the rejected and resurrected'. Rejected and resurrected – from the broken and found comes the true power to heal. It is our command.