

the **'I AM'** sayings

**The Good Shepherd - Jesus the restorer**

This week we look at the shepherd metaphor and consider how Jesus renews and restores. Perhaps if Jesus were living in London today, he might say 'I am the... good politician, foreman, ward sister or office manager. The shepherd metaphor is mainly about doing leadership God's way. But it's more than that. It's about the way we follow too, and

the way we participate in God's restoring work.

The inspiration for this Advent theme has been the 'I am' calligraphic artwork dedicated to God on Advent Sunday and displayed in St John Chapel.

## what's needed?

### essential:

- Bible
- about 30 mins of your time
- being up for a challenge

available on  
[www.stgileschurch.co.uk](http://www.stgileschurch.co.uk)

## Week 3 – 'I AM' the Good Shepherd

*Shepherding is by nature a hard way to make a living. A recent TV programme showed a 'contract' shepherd with responsibility for 6,000 sheep. The pay is poor, and the working conditions are tough. Sheep like rugged and steep terrain and are well adapted to bleak weather conditions. Not so humans! Shepherds have to be resistant to cold and damp, and all for the sake of a bunch of sheep who probably prefer following each other than a human!*

*Shepherding in Israel had the added hazard of ferocious wild animals. The men that risked their lives in this inhospitable environment found it hard to eek out a living, and some resorted to petty theft to supplement their earnings.*

*Jesus uses this tough, roguish image as a metaphor for himself and God. The 'good' description might have been to distance God from the unsavoury side of shepherds, but more likely to contrast with the irresponsible shepherds referred to in Jeremiah's prophecy.*

*In Jeremiah's time, the leaders of the people of Israel were likened to the bad shepherds who had driven the people away from God rather than leading them in God's ways. In chapter 23.1-6, Jeremiah prophesies that God himself will come and lead his flock. Perhaps when Jesus declared himself the Good Shepherd, he was announcing he was the fulfilment of this prophecy.*

*Jesus is a good shepherd, a first class leader, loyal to his people, wise, righteous, protective and caring. He is a leader and king far superior to all other leaders that Israel or the world has known or ever will know.*

*Unlike many leaders, he puts the safety of his people before his own safety.*

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*'the good shepherd gives up his life for his sheep'.*

*Self sacrifice goes with the territory of shepherding. It was customary for a shepherd to sleep across the entrance to the sheepfold, acting as a human gate. Sheep hustlers, wolves and bears would have to meet him first. I expect there were a lot of shepherds suffering from sleep deficiency!*

*We can't understand the self-sacrificial element of the shepherd metaphor without considering who the sheep represent - us! This is not as insulting as it sounds as sheep in Jesus' time were a much prized possession, perhaps not quite as much as a BMW, but somewhere near!*

*The ultimate self sacrifice made by our good shepherd was dying on the cross, so that the penalty of our waywardness can be paid and our relationship with God the Father restored. Jesus, the Good Shepherd did this because each of us is highly prized.*

*Good shepherding doesn't mean that the sheep are allowed to do what they like. They are guided to the best places and kept in line when danger lurks. The crook is a symbol of protection, but when it is round the neck of a sheep and used to pull it back from a precipice, it might not feel that comfortable! Likewise, the Good Shepherd's discipline is sometimes difficult to understand or appreciate, but ultimately it is for our benefit. His motivation is love and his aim is restoration.*

*The Good Shepherd is an inspiration for all in leadership, all who set an example, in fact all Christians as we engage in God's work of restoring His world back into a relationship with Him.*

*We live in a privileged era between Christ's first and second advent. God has begun his work of restoring all things through Christ, and we wait in eager expectation for the completion of the restoration when Jesus comes again. In the meantime, we are called*

*to follow the Good Shepherd and participate in God's work of restoration.*

*The Psalmist captures this role when he says of God, 'he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul'. In fulfilling the role of restorer, Jesus is echoing the work of the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23, and revealing his divine nature.*

### **Thinking, acting and praying:**

What particular aspect of the metaphor of the shepherd inspires you to follow Christ today? Is it his leadership, his self-sacrificing love, his willingness to forego comfort, his care and protection, his strength in times of danger? Or something else?

Read John 10.12-21 two or three times.

- Find one phrase or idea that stands out for you and ask God to speak to you through it as you meditate on that phrase.
- In this passage, the Good Shepherd is contrasted with other shepherds who are not really committed to the welfare of the sheep. What in these verses distinguish the Good Shepherd

from other people employed to lead the sheep?

- Ask God to show you an influence on your life that is competing for the leadership role the Good Shepherd should have.
- What one change could you make this Advent to commit more of your life to be led by the Good Shepherd?

### **Prayer Suggestion:**

Jesus had compassion on the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9.36). Pray for any you know who are bewildered, frightened, or unsettled at this time and pray that they will know the compassion of Christ.

The 'I AM' artwork will be available in St John's chapel for viewing and contemplation as from the first week of Advent. Also available are notes to accompany the 'I AM' sayings and explain the symbolism used by Tim Noad