



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God’s presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

John 10:1-6 ‘Jesus the Good Shepherd’

¹ ‘Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.’ ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

These poor lambs. How old are they? Days at most, maybe even hours? And then some farmer comes along with a spray can and before you know it you have an 83 or 84 all over your side. Talk about a traumatic start to life! It reminds me of the opening of *The Prisoner* series starring Patrick McGoochan captured, imprisoned and nameless – just given the number ‘6’ to use. He defiantly refused his number:



“I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed or numbered!”

In the middle of lambing season, this process is followed all over the countryside, and lambs everywhere are numbered as a sign of ownership. And before we get overly sentimental, let’s not forget that these cute fluffy creatures are also a valuable commodity for hard-pressed rural communities. It does mean these lambs belong not just to the farmer, but also to the mother, who has the exact same corresponding number on her side. While the number, of course, means nothing to the lamb and sheep who nuzzle one another regardless, it’s connects one to the other very clearly.

Jesus is fond of using pastoral imagery, which would have been intensely familiar to the people he was so often with. Although most of us probably feel a little removed from it these days – more familiar with supermarkets than farms – we should give Jesus’ words the weight they deserve. They suggest a wonderful intimacy between God and his people; a warmth and a connection at a profound level. They also suggest a sense of God and people *belonging* together, rather than one of ownership or a relationship loaded with economics, self-interest, or power. Jesus offers not some distant, strange God, but one who knows, cherishes, and loves us.

Prayer: Shepherd God,

may we know your voice, as you know ours;
whether our voice is spoken or just a silent longing within;
whether your voice is loud and clear or just a quiet sense within.
Thank you for coming close to us in our time of need and worry,
for loving us tenderly, protecting us fiercely, and never abandoning us.
May we know your voice, as you know ours, Shepherd God. Amen.

