

## Home Group leader notes - Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2019 - A Community that Seeks Out

### The lost sheep & the good shepherd

Shepherding in the hill country of Israel and Judah was a tough job – not idyllic. (And of course, being a sheep farmer today is not idyllic either!) For the Jewish people, and for Jesus, there was a long inheritance of talking about the ruler as the shepherd of the people. It is a wonderfully complex metaphor of power, protection, commitment and intimate compassion.

### Good and bad shepherds in the Old Testament

**Read:** Ezekiel 34.1 – 10 and make a note of what bad shepherds do, and what happens when bad shepherds are in charge.

**Now, read:** Ezekiel 34.11 – 16 and make a note of what the Lord promises to do.

What is God saying to his people through these two passages?

What is he saying to their rulers?

What do these passages say to you?

**Read:** Luke 15. 3-7 John 10.11 – 18

Keep in mind the context (Luke 15. 1-2). Because of Jesus's association with "the crowd," the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered their disapproval. For them such association suggests that Jesus is no better than the crowds.

When something of value is lost, the natural human response is to look for it. In this case the shepherd is willing to leave the ninety-nine in the open country (at some slight risk to them) in order to search for the lost sheep. When it is found, there is great rejoicing.

Compare the story of the lost sheep with John's teaching on the good shepherd in John 10.14-18 (keeping also in mind the passage in Ezekiel!)

### The good shepherd looks for the lost:

Luke 15. 3-7 and John 10.16, there are sheep that belong to Jesus, whom he must seek and save. In our nation today, where do you sense the shepherd's longing for the 'not-yet-found'? How is God prompting you?

### The good shepherd knows his sheep:

This is why the good shepherd sticks by the sheep when the wolf comes (John 10. 12-14) – because he knows the sheep by name (John 10. 14), and they belong to him. Who knows you best? What does it mean to you to say that God 'knows' you?

### The good shepherd cares for the sheep:

He has always cared, from lambing, through feeding, protecting, and gently tending the sheep. Some-times the shepherd does what is right, not what is easy. How does our Good Shepherd care for us?

**And finally...** Seeking out the lost includes getting to know and caring for those God seeks to reach. How do we become a community of believers that listens to, learns from and cares about those living in the parish?

