**St James, Bolton Talk for Sunday 3/5/20 on John 10 1-10, by Jenny Medley**

While researching this talk, I came across a phrase, I’d never heard of before its “ a Paradigm shift”. So I had to look it up Paradigm is a new word to me. Paradeem

And I discovered that, a paradigm is a basic accepted understanding and way of thinking about a subject, shift means a change of direction or position so a paradigm shift is an event that changes the basic understanding of something and can have dramatic effects on the way we live our lives. Hmm!

For example, Darwin’s theory of evolution changed the way we understood creation so it brought about a paradigm shift. When Galileo discovered the moons of Jupiter and realised that the Sun was the centre of the universe and not the earth it totally changed the way people viewed the world.

A modern example could be the invention of the internet, and thank God that we do have it in these strange times. The internet has caused a paradigm shift that has greatly changed the way we communicate, the way we work, the way we learn. Many people think that If you don’t have email you are living in the dark ages. And over the last few weeks we’ve all been learning about Zoom, Facetime, and YouTube just to mentally survive the lockdown. The internet has also become our primary source for information. You don’t have to wait for the morning newspaper or watch the evening news anymore You can get instant, up-to-date news by using the Internet. Want to know something? its literally at your fingertips, although we all have to stay cautious, not everything we read or everyone we interact with is true or reliable.

Our passage from St John’s gospel is part of a longer story beginning in chapter 9 when Jesus healed a blind man. As was the custom the man’s family took him to the Pharisees and they investigated the healing. The Pharisees were an unofficial but powerful group who’s aim was to purify Israel through intensive observance of the Jewish law. Unfortunately, they took advantage of common folks and retained power for themselves. Things like healing, salvation or repentance of sins, required their permission. And their strict adherence to the law often caused great hardship for the poorest people. In this instance the Pharisees didn’t believe that the man had been blind and threw him out

In todays passage the first paragraph is a parable where Jesus, says the man who enters the sheep pen by the door is the shepherd, but those who enter by climbing over the wall are thieves and robbers. They are the hackers and scammers of that time. St John helpfully tells us that the people didn’t understand so Jesus changes tack and in verse 7 declares he is the gate of the sheep fold

Jesus explicitly said that “anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.” In verse 9 “But whoever enters through me will be saved” In other words there is only one door that leads to salvation; the door of Christ. Jesus was causing a paradigm shift he was changing our understanding of God.

There are many references in the old testament of God being described as a shepherd:- Psalm 23 for example, Psalm 80 , or Ezekiel 34, 12 where it says “ As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock so will I look after my sheep” In a world where everyone knew about the intimate contact between shepherd and sheep this was the prefered way of talking about kingship. A shepherd knows his flock personally, each animal counts. No one is better than another. His voice is a familiar one. He cares for his sheep and has their best interest in mind, rather than his own. Sheep follow him because they trust him. He cares for them by protecting them at night and in the morning leads them to new pasture where he sets them free.

So, if Jesus is the gate then we all have direct access to God the shepherd. but what is exciting about this passage is that it’s not a locked gate, God doesn’t confine us or restrict us, verse 9 says we can come in and go out to find pasture he has come so that we have life and have it to the full. The Pharisees resisted any change that would undermine their authority or might cause them to lose power. They attempted to destroy Jesus, by nailing him to a cross, but as we all know, they were not successful because the love of God prevailed as he raised Jesus from the dead. Another paradigm shift that changed the world for ever

2000 years later you may feel that Christianity is not relevant to our modern world. That the church is old fashioned and out of date, but the church is not a building, it is the people, the followers of Christ and Jesus still invites us to enter through the gate So, you can “have life, and have it abundantly?”

In this modern world we interpret “abundance” with success and prosperity. But, for Jesus abundance means something quite different.

To live abundantly is to be aware that God knows us personally, like a shepherd who knows his sheep. It means we have the confidence that we are cared for. It also means we are tuned in to God’s will for our lives, like the sheep who listen to the familiar voice of the shepherd.

When we accept this change of direction these are our priorities. First, we have to live our lives as though we are dependent on God. Second, we listen and give the voice of God the highest priority. Third, we follow. When we do these things, we are living in abundance because a great weight has been lifted off our shoulders

Many of us don’t like change, It is natural for us to want to control our own lives but if we accept Jesus as the “doorway” to life then we must be willing to go out and go in when the door is open and stay put when the door is closed.

And we’ve done a lot of that recently, I believe we are living through a paradigm shift at the moment. This pandemic and lockdown are changing our whole outlook on life. We long for things to return to normal and they will, but normal will be different. Suddenly we have been forced to stop thinking of me first and put community first. We live in lockdown and stop travelling and our atmosphere and world starts healing itself. Front line services are suddenly important. Living in isolation proves that we need people we need community. The early church as described in our first reading from Acts 2 lived in community they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Perhaps we need to go back to basics. We are living in scary times but remember God loves us, God is in control. Trust in him.

Amen

Jenny Medley