

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER: 7th May 2017**Acts 2: 42-end; John 10: 1-10**

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life and have it more abundantly”.

This is an interesting time to be thinking about this Gospel against a background claims and counter-claims in the political arena, where no-one seems able to say with anything even remotely like confidence just what is true. Jesus warns against false shepherds, thieves and robbers, people who daren't enter the sheepfold by the gate, as indeed he often warned against false teachers, the Pharisees with their obsession about outward observance rather than inner truth and integrity.

Indeed just this year we've invented a whole new language which even further exacerbates this difficulty in knowing who to trust, whose voice to listen to. Fake news, alternative facts, these things even break down language itself. What on earth is an alternative fact, if not, very probably a lie?

So who do we listen to? Where do we get the truth and the inspiration that we need? Well for me, and I find myself surprised by this in some ways, I find some of my truth and inspiration in the very place where there's almost too much information and some of it very negative indeed. But I admit that I'm often inspired by things that people share on Facebook. Some of our leaders may not be too inspirational at the moment, but people in general are amazing. By their fruits ye shall know them. And the sheer goodness of people and the wonderful things they do for each other gives me hope.

I want to know that the little boy with Downs syndrome I baptised ten years ago has just won a race in his school sports. Facebook tells me that, as well as bringing me spiritual inspiration shared person to person amongst thousands of people. You see truths being recognised by being shared all around the world.

Ted talks on Youtube do the same. (Technology, Entertainment and Design). I was put on to Ted talks a few years ago when a young check-out operator in Scotmid, a science student, told me about them. Some of the world's finest minds, some famous, most not, are given a platform for a fifteen minute speech on anything from how to make friends or cope with being lonely, to picking yourself up after a business failure, or, one of my favourites the new phenomenon of guerrilla gardening. That's seriously dangerous subversives who go out at dead of night (or in the daytime) and they transform waste ground by planting seeds, bulbs, flowers, shrubs and making desolate parts of urban areas blossom. The sorts of place where local councils are apt to give them a hard time because it's ok for people to dump shopping trolleys, abandoned fridges and all kinds of rubbish in those places and leave them like that, but it's not ok to plant flowers.

By their fruits ye shall know them. So I guess what I'm saying and wanting to celebrate is that in a year where truth seems hard to find in this bizarre, twisted world of alternative facts, there is Truth out there and for millions of people, especially the young but not only the young, it is instantly recognisable when you see it. On social media and

the internet there is much darkness for sure, but there is also much light and life. Any skill you can think of, someone will have put up a website or a Youtube video to share their knowledge. You can learn anything. And for anything you hope to do whether it's in your own life, or in your local community or in the world, you can connect with likeminded people who share your aspirations.

Because the human longing for goodness, that positive embracing of your world and your own place in it shared with others, that desire for abundant life, all these things good things are infectious. We're not confused by fake news or alternative facts. We know truth when we see it.

And the early Church, our forebears in faith, they did just that without the internet. See how these Christians love one another. Instead of individualism and everyone for themselves, these men and women – whom some of their neighbours would have thought were crazy – shared everything they had, all things in common. They ate together with glad and sincere hearts. They enjoyed the favour of the people and the Lord added daily to their number. And no wonder, because that kind of loving and that kind of joy are infectious. They didn't have Facebook, but they shared anyway. The truth they had discovered, the truth which had utterly captivated them was written in their lives and on their faces. It's unmistakeable. No spin, no lies, no fake news about these Christians could contradict what people could actually see.

And I guess what people saw, what validated everything, was Jesus. They saw people who mirrored the selfless love of the Good Shepherd himself. These were people who were tasting what abundant life feels like when finally you get it and you allow the Good Shepherd to lead you into pastures you never imagined possible, into a new freedom and fullness of life. His ultimate validation is the Cross where you see what kind of Shepherd this is and whether you really can trust him with your life. Not the kind of shepherd or supposed leader who runs away when things get tough, not the kind of shepherd who rejects you because you're maybe not the most perfect specimen in the flock, but one who stays with you – won't let you go (ever) all the way to the Cross (all the way to your Cross), and beyond that the hope of eternal life with him. Held in his arms for ever. That's the promise, the truth of which is evidenced by his life which has no purpose at all other than to be united with you and to give you love and freedom and abundant life, as a gift and a birthright.

That's the kind of Shepherd we follow and that's the kind of truth in which we trust.