

High St Uniting Church Frankston
Provision and Guidance Psalm 23 and John 9: 1 - 12



Over the years I have made some pretty poor decisions at times. Decisions based in self-interest, in emotions, based in now with no thought to the future. This world, particularly this wonderfully gifted culture with all its possibilities and options, is complex and can be difficult to navigate. Add to the difficulty of decision-making family expectations, cultural expectations, religious expectations, real or imagined, and you start to get a picture of life as a maze. And for some, the vast range of possibilities can make decisions so difficult

that they freeze. We yearn for advice, guidance, the outside view that can point us in the right way. So, despite all the negatives associated with being called a sheep, we yearn for a shepherd.

Normally the lectionary pairs a Psalm with the Old Testament reading, and the Gospel follows a different path. So, this week we have Psalm 23 paired with the story of Samuel anointing David – this is traditionally David’s psalm, and it talks of anointing the head with oil, and that is what Samuel does. However, there is something else tying today’s readings. The story of the man born blind in John is not just a healing story – not just about light and sight, even spiritual sight – it quickly becomes a condemnation of the pharisees as bad shepherds of the people of Israel. This connection is made more apparent after Easter with the traditional Shepherd Sunday, when Psalm 23 is paired with John chapter 10 and the great sayings of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the gate for the sheep. So, again, we have in the man born blind, and I am not denying his blindness or the wonders of Jesus healing, a story that leads us to think about guidance, being able to see a way forward. A story that picks up the yearning for a shepherd.

A lot of the poor decisions that I have made would have been very different if I had stopped, asked advice, prayed, discerned, taken some steps to break through the maze of self-interest, emotion, expectation, and immediacy. If I had sought guidance. Not some big flashy sign, or a voice from heaven, but “have you thought about”, or “have you considered the story of” or “have you quietened the rush by sitting down beside still waters.” Guidance, leading, inspiration. There’s a lot of stories in scripture that are, “the Spirit led him” or “the Spirit took him” or “I was shown in a vision” and wouldn’t that be nice. All the confusing freedom and complexities of life cut through by God’s clear instruction. But the reality for us is seek, knock, ask. Take the steps to find guidance. Do the praying and the asking. Seek guidance.

The pharisees and Scribes of Jesus’ day thought they had guidance in the form of the Law. Follow the Law and everything will go right. They forgot, or didn’t understand, that the heart of the Law was love. Love that meant the law should be followed with compassion and justice. Why was that man begging in the streets simply because he was blind? Why did the disciples so quickly ascribe his blindness to sin? Where was the compassion? Where was the justice? Read on through chapter 9 of John, you may already be familiar with the

story, and see that the man had parents who could have been looking after him. But their fear of the Pharisees and the condemnation of being sinners forced the man onto the streets. Where was the compassion? The picture I chose for today comes from a different age, but what a different image of shepherding and guidance it offers compared to that poor man on his own, reduced to begging. The pharisees were meant to be the shepherds of the people guiding them by the will of God shown in the Law. Instead, they became administrators of righteousness, demanding obedience to a set of regulations. Instead of shepherds who knew the people by name and lead them to peace and joy, they were sheepdogs corralling the people and nipping at their heels. The spiritual blindness of the Pharisees meant that they could not see people, fellow Israelites, who yearned for guidance to find the will of God. They didn't see a man who was blind and needed guidance and help to get through life. They saw a sinner who had to be ostracised.

What happens when you seriously take up David's words, "The Lord is my shepherd"? What happens when you take seriously Jesus' story and say, "Lord, I am blind, open my eyes to your way"? Fewer poor decisions. More compassion, more justice. I'm not talking about everyday living; what clothes to buy, where to park, which way to walk. I'm talking about the big decisions, the ones that effect your life and the lives of loved ones. The decisions that, with guidance, can lead to green pastures and still waters, and without guidance, can lead to rocky paths and turbulence. Let the Lord be your shepherd, let the Lord open your eyes; allow yourself to be guided.

The world is filled with possibilities and options, and we can be burdened with expectations so that our walk with Christ starts to look complex. Our yearning for a shepherd, for guidance, is not an abandonment of responsibility, it's an acceptance of help and an acknowledgement of our place as children of God and sheep of God's pasture.