

# Let's get real!

The sermon preached by the Rev Dr Michael Paterson  
at the St Margaret's Eucharist on 25 April 2021 (Easter 4 – Good Shepherd Sunday)  
The readings were Acts 4.5–12; 1 John 3.16–24; John 10.11–18



I wonder what you make of the wee drawing on the service sheet of Jesus the Good Shepherd?

I wonder how you respond to it?

I asked Martin to include it because it's fairly typical of what we find in Christian Art: Jesus, strong, able-bodied, fit and upright, with a lamb across his shoulders, and sheep around his feet.

It's an image we are used to seeing. An image of tenderness, an image of care, an image of costly love and commitment.

But, let's get real, have you ever seen sheep as clean as that?

Where's the matted wool?

Where's the caked-in mud?

Where's the swarm of flies?

Where are the fleas?

And where's the incessant baaing as the lamb wriggles to get free?

A year into this pandemic:

A God who only shows up for the spotless is no God for me.

A God who only picks up the neat and the tidy is no God for me.

And a God only willing to carry those who don't wriggle and resist is no God for me.

In the midst of a personal and global pandemic:

We need a shepherd who doesn't need us to come clean and tidy in our Sunday best.

We need a shepherd who is familiar with the dirt and the dung, the mess and the muddle.

We need a shepherd who gets up close and personal even when we stink or bleed or are covered in sores.

We need a shepherd who doesn't give up on us when we lock horns with Him and resist his advances.

This year, more than ever, we need a Shepherd:

who accepts and embraces our bruised and battered bodies

and our even more bruised and battered souls and mental health

We need a God who doesn't approach us in a mask, or gloves or PPE.

We need a Shepherd who comes so close that He cannot but feel the rise and fall of our wheezing lungs nor fail to hear the sound of our racing pulse;

a God so close that He smells of the sheep.





In a world that has been ravaged by this  
pernicious virus

in which the poor are once again  
abandoned to the dungheap  
and even the well-to-do have sleepless  
nights,

we need to tell a better story about our  
God,

we need to tell the world a better story  
than the sanitized and disinfected  
versions for which the Church has  
become known.

We need to tell a story about a God

in which the people caught up in India's  
health crisis

and those in the West with private health  
insurance

can recognize themselves today.

A story in which those who have profited  
from the pandemic

and those who are broken beyond  
measure can find themselves included.

A story of a God who entered the world in  
the muck of a manger

got up close and personal to those who  
were suffering

and whose life ended – not between two  
silver candlesticks – but in a bloody  
mess on the cross.

A story of a God who was not – as the image  
on today's service sheet presents –

only and always strong and able, fit and  
upright

but also beaten, bruised, crushed and  
vulnerable.

And so, this Good Shepherd Sunday,

Let's consign the anodyne and sanitized  
Jesus to history

and let's hear it for the real Shepherd

the dusty, sweaty, unwashed Jesus

who gets up close and personal,

down and dirty with people like you and I  
who know we need Him.

Dear friends, let's tell a story of a Shepherd  
worthy of the title 'GOOD'.

And then, let's join people the whole world  
over, in that confident psalm of praise:

Yea, though I walk through  
death's dark vale,

yet will I fear none ill:

for thou art with me, and thy rod  
and staff me comfort still.

Amen.