

Collect: Risen Christ, faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep: teach us to hear your voice and to follow your command, that all your people may be gathered into one flock, to the glory of God the Father.

Sermon: My sheep hear my voice. John 10:27. Revd David Treharne

Good Shephard, may we hear your voice. Overmatch our resistant ears with your transforming speech. May your word penetrate our hearts and minds and bring us to eternal life.

Decisions and Discernment

Life is full of decisions and choices where we have to weigh up what is right, good, true and wholesome. And we need that spiritual gift that I spoke about at my interview 10 years ago... Discernment. Discernment in all aspects of our lives to make good, wise decisions and carry out their associated actions.

In ALL of life we need to hear the Shepherd's voice. His voice to lead and to guide, to change and transform, to discern and decide.

"My sheep hear my voice" says Jesus. It's a simple and straightforward image for us to hold on to. The Shepherd speaks and the sheep know the voice and respond to it. Yet it's so jolly hard with so many voices clambering for our attention. **Pray for discernment to hear and know God's voice!**

My sheep hear my voice.

Memory is important faculty for us to use.

Recall the words of Jesus. Recall the Scriptures. When we're scared, God says, "Do not fear." (Isaiah 41:13) "I am with you always." (Matthew 28:20)

When we feel or think God doesn't care. His Word says, Ps 37:23&24. "*He delights in every detail of their lives.*" "*the Lord holds them by the hand.*"

How good are you are calling to mind God's word? "*But this I call to mind... and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.*" Lamentations 3:21-23

Thankfully we don't have to just rely on our memory these days. We have the bible and all kinds of godly wisdom and guidance at our fingertips. We can access God's word with great ease, and we can usually find something of God speaking to us in our situation(s).

Identity

One of the biggest areas of life, if not the biggest, where we need to hear the Shepherd's voice is regarding our identity and who we are. As Christians there can be such a spiritual assault in this area.

When Jesus entered the wilderness for the 40 days and 40 nights he'd just had that amazing baptism experience and the words booming from heaven "*You are beloved Son!*" Then led by the Spirit into the wilderness to fast the devil challenged Jesus' obedience to that voice and therefore his identity, twice... "*If... you are the son of God... turn stones into bread. Throw yourself down.*" Matthew 4:1-7. Again, on the Cross, "*if you are the son of God, save yourself and come down from the Cross.*" Matthew 27:40

Voices were tempting Jesus to dismiss his father's voice and relationship. That happens to us, especially as we live out our faith day to day. The other voices just take over.

It is very easy to live our Christian lives living in words that steal and kill and destroy. THE voice of the Good Shepherd does not steal and kill and destroy.

"I'm rubbish." "I'm a failure." "I'm not loved." "I can't change." "I can't be helped." "I don't know why you bother." Guilt. Shame. Hate. Vilification. Criticism. Fear. Pride. Selfishness... "I'm going to do my own thing!" The Good Shepherd does not define us like this. However, responding to these things rather than the voice of the Good Shepherd can end up shaping who we are, how we behave and what we say.

Some of you may remember the revelation about Archbishop of Canterbury's biological father back in 2016.

Speaking about the news which was about to become public Archbishop Justin said, "We need to be a church where I am who I am because I am in Jesus Christ. That's the only thing that gives me identity and you will see why I am saying that in a couple days' time."

His life story has been tough. He describes the alcoholism of both his parents, his "messy" early life, the death of his baby daughter in a car accident and now the public revelations about him and his family.

Such experiences can define one's identity very easily. Yet, what we hear in his story is an identity being formed by grace and love, mercy and healing, Christ and eternity.

Many of us are proud of our families, our nation and our nationality... I am! However, my identity is in more than these things. My citizenship is in heaven. God is my Father, YOU are my family. My home is the Father's house... residing on this earth is temporary accommodation. Earthly things are temporary and to be valued and enjoyed. But to know Christ is to be valued and enjoyed above all things.

When we are baptised, we are baptised into Christ... we are children of God and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. Our union with Christ Jesus informs and defines who we are.

We sign those baptised with the sign of the Cross. Branded for him. Known and identified in HIM.

Hear and Respond to the Call: My sheep listen to my voice.

Don't listen to voices that seek to steal, kill and destroy and don't pass on that voice either. Listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and pass on HIS words when speaking to someone or about them. Pope Francis in a sermon once said that while gossip might seem to be an innocent amusement "like enjoying candy" it fills us with bitterness and even poisons us. If we decided to avoid this poison candy we would eventually become holy.

Are you and I ready to respond to the voice of the Good Shepherd calling out to living out life for him? Hear his word(s).

Love the Lord with heart, soul, mind and strength, and love one another. Forgive each other. Follow Christ. Worship the Lord. Pray. "Come on. do this, be this, fund this, support that, give time to this or that. Be still. My sheep hear my voice.

- My sheep listen to my voice when there are decisions to be made.
- My sheep hear my voice and know their identity. Who they are!
- My sheep hear my voice and follow me and respond to the call I give them.

Finally, one of the hardest things is **hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd in times of trouble and hardship.**

I've been challenged over the years with this, particularly with Kathy and the cancer. It was the old chestnut of what voice to listen to. The problem voice or the voice of promise?

We don't deny the problem – that is wholly unscriptural - "I'm not ill", "this isn't happening to me", "I'm fine!" But we are not defined by the problem. We are ultimately defined by the promise.

We have a choice to live in the darkness of problems or live in the light of his promises.

- **Problem...** "I have sinned" "I am a sinner" "I've messed".
Promise of God... "Your sins are forgiven." "Go and sin no more." "Neither do I condemn you." "He who the Son sets free is free indeed."
- **Problem...** "I'm empty, hungry, thirsty, unfulfilled inside."

Promise of God... “I am the living bread.” “I will give you living water.” “I will fill you.” “My grace is sufficient. “I have come that you might have life, life in all its fullness.”

- **Problem...** “I’m in the dark.”

Promise of God... “I AM the LIGHT!”

- **Problem...** “I’m tired, hurting, sick and suffering.”

Promise of God... “Nothing can separate you from my love.” “I am the Lord that heals.” “Come to me and I’ll give you rest.”

- **Promise...** “I’m lost and lonely.”

Promise of God... “I will never leave you or forsake you.” “Draw near to me and I’ll draw near to you.”

- **Promise...** “I’m facing death.”

Promise of God... “I am the resurrection and the life.” “You listen to my voice.” “I know you and you follow me.” “I give you eternal life and you shall never perish.” “No-one can snatch you out of my hand!”

May we hear your voice. Overmatch our resistant ears with your transforming speech. May your word penetrate our hearts and minds and bring us to eternal life.

Welby speaks of redemption after revelations about his biological father

Posted: 09 Apr 2016 @ 10:24

by **Madeleine Davies in Zambia**

THE Archbishop of Canterbury has described the revelation about the identity of his biological father as a story of redemption and hope.

Until a month ago, the Archbishop, the Most Revd Justin Welby, believed that his father was Gavin Welby, a difficult, alcoholic man who divorced Justin's mother when Justin was only three, and who died when he was 21.

The discovery that he is, in fact, the son of the late Sir Anthony Montague Browne, Sir Winston Churchill's last private secretary, followed a DNA test. This was prompted by evidence pieced together by Charles Moore of The Daily Telegraph.

The results had come as a "complete surprise", the Archbishop said in a statement on Friday. After describing the alcoholism of both his parents, and his "messy" early life, he went on to speak of his pride in his mother, who has been in recovery since 1968, and a life of "great blessing and wonderful support".

He went on: "My own experience is typical of many people. To find that one's father is other than imagined is not unusual. To be the child of families with great difficulties in relationships, with substance abuse or other matters, is far too normal."

The Archbishop decided to take the DNA test — in which his mouth swabs were compared with hair samples from Sir Anthony — after Mr Moore went to him privately to tell him of rumours that he had heard from the Browne family. Mr Moore arranged the test. The Telegraph reports that the results showed a 99.9799 per cent probability that they were father and son.

Archbishop Welby received the results on the Wednesday of Holy Week and shared them with his mother the following day, telling her: "I wasn't in any way upset, which I wasn't, and I remain not upset."

His mother, Lady Williams of Elvel, who has served on the Parole Board and as a magistrate, said in a statement that the news had come as an "almost unbelievable shock". Neither she nor Gavin Welby had ever doubted that they were the parents of Justin, who was born almost nine months to the day after their marriage.

“I have watched Justin, from an almost impossible childhood, grow into what he is today, marry his beautiful wife, Caroline, and see his children and now grandchildren grow up,” she said. “As a family we are truly blessed.

“But none of this would have been possible without our firm Christian faith and a determination never to relinquish hope. God has given us so much and my gratitude knows no bounds.”

Speaking on *Today* on BBC Radio 4, Mr Moore said that the Archbishop had been most concerned about the effect of the news on his mother, born Jane Portal, now Lady Williams after her second marriage in 1975.

In his statement, the Archbishop said: “By the grace of God, found in Christian faith, through the NHS, through Alcoholics Anonymous, and through her own very remarkable determination and effort, my mother has lived free of alcohol, has a very happy marriage, and has contributed greatly to society as a probation officer, member of the National Parole Board, Prison Visitor and with involvement in penal reform.”

He went on: “I know that I find who I am in Jesus Christ, not in genetics, and my identity in him never changes. Even more importantly, my role as Archbishop makes me constantly aware of the real and genuine pain and suffering of many around the world, which should be the main focus of our prayers.

“Although there are elements of sadness, and even tragedy in my father’s case, this is a story of redemption and hope from a place of tumultuous difficulty and near despair in several lives. It is a testimony to the grace and power of Christ to liberate and redeem us; grace and power which is offered to every human being.”

He had hinted at the revelation to come during his discussions with young Africans on the eve of the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Zambia on Friday.

"We need to be a church where I am who I am because I am in Jesus Christ," he told them. "That’s the only thing that gives me identity and you will see why I am saying that in a couple days’ time."

Church officials had been prompted to check canon law, the Telegraph reported, to clarify that the results had no bearing on the Archbishop’s eligibility to hold his post. It was discovered that, under Archbishop Fisher in the 1950s, canon law was changed to state that: “No person shall be refused consecration as bishop on the grounds that he was born out of lawful wedlock.”

The reports were briefly discussed before opening prayers at the second day of the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Zambia on Saturday. The statement by the Archbishop, present among members, was read out by the Bishop at Lambeth, the Rt Revd Nigel Stock.

Despite it being worthy of a soap opera, the news had been “very carefully reported” Bishop Stock said. He was “really delighted” that journalists had drawn out the themes of redemption, grace, and hope.

Visibly moved, he described the Archbishop's response: "I feel his openness, his complete honesty, is absolutely typical of the man I work with. One of the things that always strikes those who work with him is the closeness of his family and the way they support each other through all that life throws at them. . . All that remains absolutely true."

The General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the UK, Bishop Angaelos, issued a statement of support, praising the Archbishop's "very moving" statement, which was "indicative of the peace, love, forgiveness and resolve that we are not only all called to, but all endowed with if w but allow God's healing, reconciling and comforting presence in our lives.

"This is of course also indicative of the personable and 'real' character we have all come to know to be Justin Welby, who, I am confident, will have this experience further enrich his ministry of compassion."

The Archbishop has previously spoken candidly about his childhood. On *Desert Island Discs* he described a lonely Christmas with his father, who was "always unpredictable, sometimes very full of rage and anger" ([News, 2 January, 2015](#)).

Sir Anthony, whom the Archbishop met as a small boy, died a few days after the Archbishop's installation in Canterbury in 2013. Shortly before he died, he was shown a picture of him banging on the door of the Cathedral with his crozier, and admitted that it was "croyable" (credible) that this was his son.

Archbishop Welby referred to his own experience on that day in his statement on Friday:

"At the very outset of my inauguration service three years ago, Evangeline Kanagasooriam, a young member of the Canterbury Cathedral congregation, said: 'We greet you in the name of Christ. Who are you, and why do you request entry?' To which I responded: 'I am Justin, a servant of Jesus Christ, and I come as one seeking the grace of God to travel with you in his service together.' What has changed? Nothing!"