

26th April, 2015.

Reading: John 10: 11 - 18

Sermon: Risk Taking

I want to start today by taking a risk. I'm going to ask you a question. What excites you? What are you passionate about? (Invite responses)

For some there is football. You can sense the excitement and the passion of fans when they talk about about a particular goal that was scored or about whose meeting who in the next round. Some people still talk about a game back in 1966 - not many in Scotland, I have to say.

Some are passionate about Tennis and watch it all year round. For some it's climbing or racing. For some it's water sports, sports like wind surfing. You can almost feel the exhilaration as they talk about riding the waves and watching them, you can get so caught up in it. It has that wow factor about it. It is amazing.

For others, it's crafts or gardening or swimming or running. For some, it's wildlife or nature which draws them in. Someone said to me the other day that he doesn't go to Church. He feels closer to God on a mountain. I hope that's not as close as he gets. But some people do find it exhilarating to be on top of a mountain surveying the wonder of creation around them. I would feel that too if I could find a helicopter to get me to the top of the mountain.

Some people could talk all day about what grips them, about what excites them and that excitement, that passion can fire up other people and get them caught up in the thrill of whatever it is that's being spoken about.

I now want to ask you another question. What excites you about your faith? When it comes to your faith, what are you passionate about? (Invite responses)

How do you express that passion? Is it a passion which is expressed only to God in the silence of your hearts? Is it a passion which is expressed only to God in prayer? Do you find that you are able to express that passion in the hymns that we sing, in the worship that you offer? Is your passion, our passion, expressed in such a way that others get caught up in it as they do at football, or rugby or wherever else large crowds gather?

I'm going to ask a final question. What excites you about your Church? (Invite responses)

Sometimes when a minister is going to do something different, like I've done today, when a minister is going to invite responses from a congregation, sometimes people think that notice should be given of the questions so that people have time to think of the answer they wish to give.

I didn't give you any warning today because when we are passionate about something, we don't need time to think. We are bursting with enthusiasm. We are on a high and desperate to share that enthusiasm with others at every opportunity.

Asking questions in worship for me was a risk, as I said at the beginning. It was a risk because what was going to

happen next was outwith my control, but sometimes we need to take a risk and particularly when it comes to outreach.

In John's gospel today we read these words of Jesus: **I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I - must -bring - them - also.** Jesus was passionate about outreach, about bringing others to faith in God. **There shall be one flock and one shepherd,** He says. **I am the gate for the sheep.**

When Jesus spoke, crowds gathered and He expected the crowd to get bigger. He expected His flock to grow, to increase in size, but then He was out there with His disciples. He was where the people were and so they heard His message of love and of forgiveness, of salvation, of life and of hope. They heard the message and Jesus said: **They too will listen.**

Jesus' message was not just for those in the inner sanctum. His message was not just for 'holy people'. His message was not just for the Jews. His message of the love of God was for the world but the world is not always welcomed by those who consider themselves to be in the inner sanctum.

Mary was looked down upon by the disciples. Her reputation had gone before her. Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors, not always a popular choice. We think to ourselves: 'That's terrible. How could they think like that?' But **we** judge each other, never mind those who come in from outside.

Sharing our faith, as Jesus did, involves a risk. We may be laughed at. We may be ignored. We may be thought of as daft. We may be thought of as Bible thumpers, not a term I've heard for a while. There's not much of it goes on any longer.

Outreach involves a risk but unless we are passionate about our faith and think we have a product worth selling, if I can put it that way, we will be wasting our time because no one is going to buy anything from us that doesn't excite us as the seller.

If we want to sell our faith to others then we need to be excited or passionate about our faith, not in a superficial way. We need to express the genuineness of our faith in a passionate way. If we are not passionate about our faith then we need to do something about that.

I heard a comment being made on television the other day about the thousands of refugees on overcrowded boats, who are drowning on their way to a new life. One of the politicians, who is campaigning at the moment, said that what is being said by those in power in Europe is that 'something has to be done'.

His comment on that was that that kind of statement is not enough. What is needed is for those in power to say what is going to be done to prevent the deaths of countless people and not simply to say that something has to be done.

When it comes to outreach and to taking the message of the gospel of love into the world, something has to be done but to say that, is not enough. We have to decide as a

Church, as the people of God in this area, as God's flock in this area, we have to decide what is going to be done by us, not by me, but by us. The world of marketing knows how to sell products and we need somehow, to tap into that. We need to find out how to sell our faith but being passionate about it is definitely the first step.

Jesus says that those who are not in the sheep pen at present will listen but that means that we have to take the message to them and not wait for them to come to us. The good shepherd goes out and gathers his flock. He would even lay down his life for them. The good shepherd rounds them up. He doesn't sit behind closed doors and wait for them to wander in to the pen.

Does that not tell us something? Outreach is hard work. It also involves risk taking but people who are passionate about life take risks. They will jump off mountains. They will ride the waves. They will climb the highest mountain and forget the cost. Bikers enjoy the thrill of being on the open roads and as one said on the television the other day, they know the risks.

If we are passionate about our faith, surely the risk, such as it is, is worth taking. We don't know what will happen. We don't know what reception we will get. But the gate to the sheepfold is being held open by Jesus so that we can bring home those who are in world.

There is a risk for those we bring home. What kind of welcome will they get for the rest of us? Will we scowl at them because they have taken our seat or moved our cushion? Will we wonder what they are doing here,

especially if we know their past? Will we treat them with the same disdain as Mary was shown by the disciples or will we hear Jesus' words ringing in our ears: **I have other sheep who are not in this sheep pen. I must bring them also** and welcome them with open arms?

We gather round the Lord's Table today to share in a meal to which Jesus invites us. He doesn't just invite some of us. He invites all of us. All are welcome to share in the gift of love which Jesus has given us. All are welcome to come and remember the sacrifice Jesus made and the life He now enjoys and gifts to us.

All are welcome. When people are made welcome in our midst, when people are treated as long lost brothers and sisters in Christ, when we celebrate their presence with us, they will experience the love of God which is for all the world.