‘these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.’

We have one of the best-known Bible passages of all today in Psalm 23 - the Lord’s my shepherd, I lack nothing, he makes me lie down in green pastures, restores me, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for **you are with me**,

Even as Precious read those passages for us this morning, I have no doubt that you could actually feel the rhythm of the verses. We hear them perhaps more often than most other passages apart from those we use at Christmas and Easter…

The Bible is a powerful book. It’s words bring us face to face with God. It is the bestselling book of all time. It can give fuel for life, comfort, it can challenge, transform our thinking. It can confuse us. Sometimes it can seem like it contradicts itself. And so much more besides, but the point of it all is taken up in making sure that when we read it, we get the whole of the story, which is summed up in the two verses we had from John 20 this morning.

The Bible exists to point us to God. If you’re the sort of person who finds verses come to mind, you can remember them well, that’s great. If you’re not, don’t worry. The Bible exists to point you to God, to introduce you to Jesus and that ‘by believing you may have life in his name’. We can fall in to a trap of thinking that if we understand the Bible properly then we’ll have everything about our relationship with God sorted out. If we only ever read books about being sons, daughters, husbands, wives, friends, but we never did anything to actually work on the relationships we had with others, that wouldn’t help much, would it. It’s the relationship we have with God that is the most important thing that we need to give attention to.

So, John wants us to believe and he thinks that if we believe in Jesus we will have life in his name. What does that mean?

When we finish prayers, we often end them, ‘in the name of Jesus, Amen.’ When we pray for people to be healed, when we ask God to bring peace, justice, to show mercy, to take care of those we love, we do so in the name of Jesus. And John says we will have life in his name. We sing, ‘at the name of Jesus will bow, every tongue confess him king of glory now’. What’s that all about? There is power in the name of Jesus. ‘You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father.’ says Jesus in John 14:13. We don’t get to play a game with the name of Jesus though, where we get everything we want and to hell with everyone. God has given Jesus authority because of his obedience and his love and his service and because of his sacrifice. Jesus died so that you and I could have freedom and access to the grace and mercy of the Father. So that when we pray, we might have the chance to be in line with the will of God. You don’t need a God who does whatever you ask. You and I need a God who does what is good for the building of the kingdom, for the purposes of love, mercy, justice and peace and so that people might turn to God while we all have the chance to.

I wanted to answer the question today ‘why do we believe what we believe?’

Here’s the answer. There is power in the name of Jesus. There is life in the name of Jesus. He is always working for the good of those who love and trust Him. He might not make our Church look the way hipster Churches look, but He is building his Church. It is his kingdom that is coming. Not our kingdom. His kingdom. The kingdom of god is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit I remember from my youth. Here’s hoping. None of us can complain about not getting the kind of kingdom we were hoping for if it looks like justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

We need looking after at the moment. We need to look after each other, as far as we are able to. God is with us. God is for us. Have you given your life to him? Have you really and truly turned it all over to him and acknowledged that you can’t do it on your own, that you don’t even want to do it on your own, anymore?

We will find shelter in the shadow of God’s wings. We will find a shepherd who is waiting to look after his sheep, his people, us. We just have to spend a little bit of time, perhaps this morning, getting over ourselves. We are people made in God’s image, made to look like God, to be like God, to have characteristics of family members of God, and the only route to it, the only passport to it, is to actually let go of our control, to relinquish our supposed mastery over ourselves and realise that we can’t shepherd ourselves, that the only way we ‘shall not want’ is to give it all up and give it all over to him.

It’s a classic and classical message this morning. Do you believe you need saving? I think you do if you’re honest. Do you believe there is a saviour? This one might be harder but think about what we’ve been talking about over the last few weeks: people needed saving, everyone at a loss to get rid of the feelings of shame and pain within, looking to God from release from all of this, along comes Jesus. He proves he is the messiah by every method and mechanism you could possibly want, finally by dying for the sins of everybody who ever lived. You know what sins are, they’re the things you hope no one ever finds out about, and he died to pay the penalty for all of yours. Then, to prove who he was and to bring glory to his Father, he rose from the dead, defeating the power of fear and shame once and for all, And here he is, inviting you to recognise him as saviour. And here He is inviting you to accept his invitation to be adopted into his family. And here he is waiting to welcome you home. And here he is waiting for you to receive the gift of life through the power of his name. And here he is inviting you to be people who tell of his goodness and mercy to the whole of the earth for the rest of your lives. Because that is what he wants you to do.

To the glory of God the Father.

Amen