

# WEEKLY SERMON

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## More than a number ...

My 14-year-old son has been given the privilege of the opportunity to travel to South Korea in the summer to take part in the World Scout Jamboree.

It's expected that 50,000 Scouts from around the world will gather in SaeManGeum where young people will be able to experience different cultures whilst joining in with an inclusive and sustainable programme of activities.

It's been an exciting time for our family as we've helped him to prepare for his trip, doing all sorts of things to fundraise money for his place as well as making practical arrangements.

Whilst filling in the myriad of forms that need to be completed in relation to travel documents, it struck me how many different numbers are used to identify people.

Passport numbers, NHS numbers, National Insurance numbers and account numbers are things that we're all familiar with and are asked to provide so that organisations know who they are dealing with when we contact with them.

These numbers seem to be more important than our name when it comes to identification and although it's not difficult to understand why these codes are used, the practice of people being reduced to nothing more than a number seems hugely impersonal.

The Gospel reading for this Sunday (John 10: 1-10) is a great reminder that Jesus knows your name! We know that our identities are important to God, so this shouldn't come as a surprise.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and he knows each and every one of us by our names, just like a shepherd knows each and every one of the sheep in his flock. The passage says:

*'He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he brings all his sheep out, he goes ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice.'*

The shepherd doesn't go on ahead until he has brought the sheep out of the pen. He doesn't leave any behind. He waits until all the sheep are out and then he leads them. You've perhaps noticed that, here in the West, shepherds tend to drive the sheep from behind.

They chase them along, often with a sheep dog nipping at their heels. In the Eastern world shepherds lead their sheep. Wherever the sheep go, the shepherd has stepped first. This creates a fantastic image of discipleship. The shepherd goes ahead, not only to point the way, but also to make sure that the path is steady and safe.

This passage helps us to build up a picture of Jesus' love for us and an understanding of his concern for our complete well-being at every turn of our lives.

You may have experienced times when it seemed that Jesus was a million miles away, however in reality, Jesus hasn't gone anywhere. He is right here with us. He knows what is happening in our lives.

He knows our thoughts and how impatient and fearful we can be, but Jesus' promise is true even when we are doubting and despairing: "I am the Good Shepherd, I know my sheep". The image of the Good Shepherd is one of love, care, protection, and closeness.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

In a world where we are often thought of as a number, Jesus knows us by name.

**Sarah Earnshaw, Diocesan Children's Work Adviser**