

26APR26 FROM HOLINESS TO WITNESS *Easter Threshold Week 3*

We are now far enough into the Easter season that the shock of resurrection has begun to settle. The tomb is still empty, the world is still changed, but the first astonishment has softened into something steadier. This is the point in the Easter Threshold where the question shifts. Not simply *What has God done?* but *What kind of life grows from this new beginning?* And that brings us to holiness.

Holiness is a word that can attract and repel in equal measure. For some, it carries the scent of beauty — a life close to God, a life that feels clean and spacious and true. For others, it carries the weight of judgement, the memory of pressure, the fear of never being enough. Most of us feel both. We long for a life that is aligned with God, and we fear what that alignment might demand. Holiness draws us in and unsettles us at the same time.

But when Acts speaks of holiness, it does not begin with pressure. It begins with a community. “They devoted themselves,” Luke says — to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayers. They shared what they had. They ate with glad and generous hearts. Their holiness was not hidden; it was conspicuous. It was visible in their habits, their generosity, their joy. Holiness here is not a private achievement but a shared life that cannot help but be noticed.

And then John gives us another angle. Jesus speaks of sheep who recognise the shepherd’s voice. Holiness, in this image, is not about moral performance. It is about belonging. It is about knowing the voice that calls your name and choosing to follow it. Holiness is the life that grows from being held, known, and led. It is the shape of a relationship.

But belonging has consequences. The shepherd’s voice is not heard by everyone. Some recognise it; some do not. And that is where Peter takes us.

[Make interspersed references to the passage, use a handout, emphasise that the ABIDE groups will follow up on the details.]

His words are not easy are they? They come from a world where Christians were a tiny, strange minority — misunderstood, mistrusted, sometimes maligned. Peter writes to people who feel like “aliens and exiles,” people whose faith makes them stand out. And he tells them something that still feels true: holiness creates distinction, distinction creates exposure, and exposure creates accountability.

Holiness creates distinction. “Abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul,” he says. In other words: there will be things you do not join in with. There will be habits you quietly refuse. There will be ways of speaking, spending, reacting, that you lay down because they do not belong to the Shepherd’s voice. Holiness is not about being better than others; it is about being shaped by Someone else.

Distinction creates exposure. “Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles,” Peter writes, “so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds...” The early Christians discovered that living differently drew attention — not always admiration, sometimes suspicion. Rumours spread. Motives were questioned. Their refusal to fit neatly into the expectations of the empire made them visible. Holiness placed them under scrutiny.

Exposure creates accountability. If your life is going to be seen, what people see matters. If your life is going to speak, let it speak truthfully. Peter is not asking his readers to be impressive; he is asking them to be recognisable. To let their lives tell the truth about the One they follow. To let their conduct — in public, in private, in the household, in the workplace — bear witness to Christ.

Peter then moves through the places where that visibility is most acute — civic life, work, marriage, community. Some of his instructions sit uncomfortably with us, shaped as they are by the structures of his time. But the thread running through them is clear: when you belong to Christ, your life is not your own. You carry his name into every room you enter. You bear his reputation in the way you respond to authority, to suffering, to conflict, to those closest to you. Holiness is not a glow; it is a posture. It is the refusal to repay evil with evil. It is the courage to bless when you are wronged. It is the quiet strength that comes from entrusting yourself to the One who judges justly.

And this is where witness begins. Not with words, but with a life that cannot be hidden. A life that is recognisably shaped by the Shepherd. A life that, in its patience and its courage and its tenderness, points beyond itself.

Our holiness and our witness are the same thing, whether we like it or not. So as we stand on this Easter Threshold — this season where resurrection is still fresh enough to reorient us — it is worth asking: where is your life most visible? In your work, your home, your friendships, your community — where does your faith already speak, for better or for worse? Where does your belonging to Christ show? And where does it blur?

But be assured my dear friends, holiness is not about becoming impressive, witness is not about becoming the loudest voice in the room. Because the world does not need perfect Christians, or shouty ones either! It needs visible ones — people whose lives, in all their ordinariness, bear witness to the One who calls them by name. And so holiness, is about becoming transparent. And witness is about letting the Shepherd’s voice be heard in the throughout the green pastures of our lives.

So this spring, what might you nurture? And what might you prune back?

And how might we as a church live so transparently that anyone looking sees the Good Shepherd amongst us?

Let us pray.

Good Shepherd,
give us courage to live lives that cannot be hidden;
that all we do may bear faithful witness to you. Amen.