

Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Fourth Sunday of Easter

8th May 2022

Have you ever been late? Arrived late for something? Even just the once?

[A wizard is never late. Nor is he early; he arrives precisely when he means to.](#) So we haven't got any wizards today. If you were a wizard you wouldn't be late.

Ok, I have another question for you. Have you ever been lost?

If you were a wizard you wouldn't be lost either. You would know exactly where you were. You just might not know exactly where that was.

So some of you have been lost. You know about being lost. I have a harder question. When you're lost, do you ask for directions?

Once again we've proved that there are two kinds of people in the world. The ones who ask for directions when they get lost, and the ones who don't.

You can take that a bit further. You can say there are two kinds of people in the world. The ones who know when they're lost – so then they ask for directions. And the ones who won't ever admit that they're lost. So obviously they don't need directions because they're not lost.

You know when you switch on the radio and you happen to catch it just at the right moment? I did that once and it said something about being lost, just as if it was answering a question I hadn't asked. The radio was in the middle of a programme about why it is that people don't like asking for directions. And I switched it on exactly at the moment that the presenter said, just like this, without a word of warning, like some kind of oracle: 'We are all born lost.'

We are all born lost.

It's an interesting thing to think. It's sort of true. We don't know where we are when we're born. But then we don't know that we're lost, because a baby is too young to know that there's such a thing as being lost. A baby knows exactly where it is, like a wizard. It just doesn't know much else.

And gradually the baby gets to know where it is in the world. I can't go on calling this baby 'it'. I'm going to borrow Lili's name for a minute. Suppose you're born. There you are, lost. But around you there are people who know you already, and you'll learn to recognise their voices – which are already strangely familiar – and they give you a name so now you're Lili, and they smile at you so you smile back, and you find yourself connected to them and you begin to learn who you are. And where you belong. And when you've got lost, which might happen from time to time.

There are two kinds of people in the Gospel reading today. There are the ones who want Jesus to say exactly who he is and what he's doing. Account for yourself! they say. And there are the ones who are getting to know him. Jesus calls the second lot sheep, and he's

not being insulting. He's saying that they have more sense than the first lot. 'My sheep hear my voice,' he says, and they know him. They might not be able to pass an exam on what he's doing, but they recognise him. They're his sheep. They've learned who they are by being part of his flock, the way Lili is learning who she is by growing up in her family.

The people who want Jesus to say exactly who he is and what he's doing don't want to learn that way. They don't want learning to change them. They want to have information, because information gives you power. But they don't want to learn, because learning changes you. These are people who would never ask for directions, because they'd never admit they could be lost.

In a moment Lili is going to be baptised, and we're going to ask her some more questions. And she's not going to answer them, because she's a baby. But her parents and godparents are going to answer, and so are we all, because we're all part of the flock that Lili is going to be part of. They're questions about growing and learning and following. She won't be able to pass an exam on Jesus by the end of the service, but that's not what baptism is about. It's the start of a life getting to know Jesus. The people in the reading say to Jesus 'Account for yourself!': but Jesus says to them, and to us, and to Lili this morning, 'Join in'.

The Very Revd Dr Elizabeth Thomson

Rector & Provost