**The Ven Dr Amanda Bloor, Archdeacon of Cleveland, reflects on John 10.22-30, for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, 11th May.**

At the heart of the gospel reading set for today, there's one devastatingly simple question: How do we know that it's all true? How can we be sure that our faith is real and that Jesus is who he claims to be?

I sometimes talk to people who say, ‘You don't really believe all that stuff, do you?’ It's always interesting to find out what ‘stuff’ it is that they mean. Is it the entire foundation of Christian faith that they're talking about? Or perhaps one element of doctrine, or one Bible passage that they can't get past? People are sometimes surprised to discover, for example, that not all Christians believe that God literally made the world in seven days.

Although faith always goes hand-in-hand with a little bit of doubt, it's unusual to be 100% sure 100% of the time. Significant doubts can be a real barrier. That's what Jesus is facing in the gospel passage. A group of people saying, prove to us who you are. Convince us that you are the Messiah. And Jesus, with a sigh says, I've told you and I've shown you. But you do not believe.

So how do you and me, how do we together strengthen and deepen our faith so that we can know ourselves to be part of that flock that Jesus longs to gather together? How do we know that it's real? Like many, I suspect I've been learning this week about the election of a new Pope for the Roman Catholic Church. It's a really structured process; authority is delegated to a chosen number of people who spend time in prayer and reflection, shut away from distractions in the belief and trust that God will be in their decision making, and that the Holy Spirit will give them wisdom and insight so that the right person is chosen.

That's not so different, actually, from the way we usually choose people to be parish priests in the Church of England. We tend to delegate authority to parish representatives, and then rely upon prayerful discernment, along with a robust interview process that draws out the necessary qualities and assesses if there is a good fit between the person and the post.

We trust that God will guide us. And I’d suggest that that process of prayer, and reflection, and study, and communal endeavour, is really helpful in strengthening our own faith. And what about those others, like the people who gathered around Jesus and asked him to prove himself? Those who can't yet make that step into faith. They may not be part of Christ's flock yet, but there's still plenty of room.

Perhaps we can play a part, those of us who are bold enough to call ourselves Christians, by what we say and do, by the way we live, the faith we profess, and the trust we cling on to.

Let's pray. Jesus Christ, loving shepherd, protector of your flock, give us the faith to know you as our saviour. Help us to demonstrate that faith to others, that they may too come to you. Be with us always. Amen.