

I Am the Good Shepherd

John 10.1-16

March 24, 2024 (Palm Sunday)

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. ² "But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. ³ "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ "When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ "A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

⁷ So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ¹² "He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ "He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. ¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

We've been looking, in the *Fourth Gospel*, at the speeches, sermons and longer conversations of Jesus Christ. We covered John's longest discourse last year between Christmas and Easter (*The Upper Room Discourse*). We conclude with the famous *Good Shepherd Discourse* in John CH 10.

What prompted this whole series was a three-volume work by an old Scottish minister (c. 1850) called, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord* by John Brown of Haddington. His work on this section is so good that I'm going to USE his outline for the middle point (just saying).

The topic, generally speaking, is leadership. Whether we call it mentoring, spiritual direction, discipleship, ministry, life-coaching, counseling, advising, guidance, pastoring – it's the need to have someone to follow, someone to show me how to progress in life, and, in the Christian sense to teach and lead me in how to relate to God. Jesus uses the image of a shepherd... the imagery is sort of complex.

As John wrote in v. 6 of this passage, "*This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand the things which He had been saying to them.*" Well, I DO understand (mainly) what Jesus is

saying... though, there are a few bumps in the road... So, let's look more closely at this topic of spiritual teaching, leadership or "spiritual authority – its use and misuse". Let's look at:

- 1) **The Bad Background**
- 2) **The Shepherd We Need**
- 3) **Engaging the Good Shepherd**

The words of Jesus here begin with, "Amen, Amen" or "Truly, Truly". NONE of His speeches begin with that formula leading us to believe that this *Good Shepherd Speech* responds to some truly BAD shepherding in the previous chapter. In Ch 9, Jesus Christ heals a man born blind. And when the Pharisees get word, they know it's a hoax because it took place on the Sabbath and a man of God wouldn't heal on the Sabbath. So, they call the now-seeing-man and ask what happened and IF HE BELIEVED this Healer was a prophet.

The young man tells them how He was cured of blindness and that... "Yeah... my guess IS, this Man IS a prophet." And the clergymen reply, "Ah! What do you know!"

Then they call in the man's parents to interrogate them about whether this IS their son, whether he was blind and IS NOW SIGHTED and "how... how could a godly man break the Sabbath... HOW?! HOW!!!???"

The man's parents evidently feel like they're being bullied and I'm sure they want only to celebrate this miracle and they're NOT getting what they expected from their holy shepherds... And in fear/frustration they reply, "Ask HIM!" Then St. John (the reporter) notes, "they said 'Ask HIM!' because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jewish leaders had already agreed that if anyone confessed Jesus to be Christ, that person would be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, 'Ask him.'" (22-23)

Imagine an alien spacecraft lands...(right here in Hollywood!) and it lands on a Disabled Parking space... and when a policeman arrives HE'S fixated on writing the ticket. He never marvels at the aliens!

So, this speech is a response to a bit of bad shepherding. The Pharisees were sticklers and had no sense of wonder and no empathy, compassion or joy in the healing of this lamb and the relief of the parents. Rules are rules!

And this background did not begin with the Pharisees. It goes all the way back to the corrupt sons of Samuel (1st Samuel 1-3). As much as we need practitioners and clergy and shepherds, there's also tremendous potential for "spiritual abuse". God addresses it in the Hebrew Bible and especially in the Prophets. Take Ezekiel CH 34 – where you'll find shocking words, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.'" (Ezek. 34.2-4)

Jesus applied this very form, “Woes” to the clergymen in His day. Matthew CH 23: *“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...”* (v. 13) Some 40 verses of WOE!

And WE get it. We’ve seen, in our own day, a rise in cult groups led by dominators and coercive authoritarians fixated on sex, power and money. We’ve seen scandals in churches of basically every denomination. I’d venture to say that some who are listening to me today have been victims or have known victims in your own families. Woe!

AND YET... Jesus also saw a need for someone to feed, protect, lead, counsel, heal, teach His sheep. He saw the neglected crowds in His day and was brokenhearted because they were like *“Sheep without a shepherd...”* (Mat 9.36) and that observation was a nod to the ancient Jewish Church and the anxiety experienced by the second generation in the wilderness when Moses was about to die... And Moses himself who was almost the archetype of a shepherd and he cries out for the people he had pastored for 40 years and in Numbers Ch 27 Moses prays, *“May the LORD... appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd.”*

There’s a need for real human leadership – strong and resistant to criticism; decisive in leading and compassionate in serving, guarding, feeding, teaching, correcting, healing, weeping, rejoicing with God’s people that they *“not be like sheep which have no shepherd.”*

And after Moses prayed for a shepherd, God replied in these prophetic words, *“So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him...”* (vv. 16-18) And as Moses was succeeded by the shepherd, Joshua... and as the Law was succeeded by the Gospel... so Moses was eventually superseded by the Better Joshua – whose name, Joshua, or YESHUA (in Heb) literally means “salvation” and He, Jesus Christ now comes on the scene to say, “I AM the successor and the predecessor; I AM the beginning and the end. Moses was the Law-Giver – I AM the Better Moses who keeps the Law for My people, the Law-Keeper.

I AM the Better Joshua! The first Joshua was a conquering shepherd, and I too go through the Land of Promise conquering with the sword coming from My mouth, the Good News, the Word of Life, that IS the power of God unto salvation for all who believe, Jew and Gentile –

“I am the Good Shepherd;
The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep!”

He’s the Good Shepherd we need and the One who can take this crucial need for leaders and teachers with all its potential for abuse and can transform the very exercise of leadership and authority into something that leads to the safety and flourishing of His people that they NOT be like sheep without a shepherd. So, how does He do that?

Let me look at FOUR WAYS (and here’s where I’m indebted to John Brown) FOUR WAYS that Jesus Christ is the Shepherd we need AND the Shepherd who can transform OUR shepherding to make it truly beneficial.

- 1)** He secures for the sheep all we need for life and godliness (2nd Peter 1.2-3). In this address Jesus Christ is calming the sheep. He's promising us access into the Fold. He is the way of entry into the Church, the "door to the sheep".

I spoke with Dan the other day and he reminded me of the stone pens in the Middle East and how the single door would be very narrow, basically able to be blocked by one human figure SO, the shepherd himself standing IN the doorway IS both Shepherd and Door.

Entering God's fold through the Door that Jesus is, we hear (v. 9) *"I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."* He saves those who enter the Church through Him.

He cares for and feeds us – *"He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."* (Ps. 23.2-3).

We have a good, almighty, generous Shepherd so we have to say, "I shall not want... I will never have a need that He can't MEET and USE in my life for GOOD! That's what kind of Shepherd we need and the kind of Shepherd He IS!"

He comes to give LIFE... not in a sparing, frugal, miserly way but abundantly, lavishly. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (10) He says, *"Abba! Kill the fattened calf, I have shepherded My brothers and sisters home!"*

Read, *St. Paul to the Ephesians*, Ch 1 and inventory all that our Good Shepherd secures for us; "forget none of His benefits!" (Psa 103) He is good and loving, generous and WORTHY!

- 2)** He secures these blessings for the sheep at the greatest possible cost to Himself, *"the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the Sheep."* It's His voluntary death that wins our place in the fold. I don't want to say too much about this because I hope to come at it again on Good Friday (you'll be here...RIGHT?!) but suffice it to say, NOTICE the contrast! The hired-hands who are more interested in eating the sheep and taking their wool – they run away when danger comes.

The Good Shepherd is owner of the sheep so He's as personally invested as He can be. Even the best of the Prophets and leaders did NOT lay down their lives in the way He will. As we'll see, some of them were even martyred but His death is no martyrdom but a willing sacrifice. (More, God willing, on Good Friday!)

- 3)** This Shepherd we need enters into and sustains a relationship with the sheep that can only be described as tender, intimate and as close as can be. *"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me"* (14)

He knows the names of His sheep. The sheep recognize and trust His voice. Those who belong to God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, those who have faith to believe are uncomfortable with strangers teaching stuff that's NOT in keeping with the Way of Grace and the Way of Jesus: v. 5 - *"a stranger they simply will not follow because they know His voice."*

We can learn from other religions. We can study all kinds of teachers and philosophies but there's only ONE VOICE that can say, "*Lazarus! Come Forth!*" (John 11) Believers in Jesus Christ have heard that Voice (Ps 29!) - it's the Voice that called me and made me alive... the Voice that spoke to the wind and the waves... His is the Voice that spoke to my troubled guilt heart and said, "*Peace! Be Still. Fear Not!*"

- 4) Jesus Christ IS the Shepherd we need by virtue of being the One Shepherd over ALL the flock. In time, when the Spirit is poured out in response to Jesus Christ's finished work, IN TIME, the call will go out to NOT ONLY the Jews but to "other Gentiles as well – "I have other sheep. He will make Jews and Gentiles into "ONE NEW MAN" (Eph 2.15)

The Father says to this One Shepherd, (in Isaiah Ch 49) "*It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the Gentiles (the nations) so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*"

We go by different names, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal, Baptist, Presbyterian but whatever the label, for anyone who has forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ, there is One Head, One Shepherd over the whole Church: "*And (God, the Father) put all things in subjection under Jesus Christ's feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*". (Eph. 1.22-23)

This one Truth about this one Shepherd has revolutionized the world and continues to do so – Jews and Gentiles, Taiwanese and Texans, rich and poor, male and female – an international nation under One Shepherd. God told us it was coming, (Ezekiel 34): "*Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.*" (v. 23)

Now, since we hope to look at this discourse on Friday and again on NEXT SUNDAY – I'll limit my counsel on how to engage this Good Shepherd (3rd Point) to these three ideas.

- 1) Our own shepherding CAN, SHOULD and MUST be radically transformed by His Shepherding.

This should speak to leaders in THIS Church. (1st Peter Ch 5): "*Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness...*" (5.1-2)

We could find similar passages regarding Christian marriage and business and government and neighboring. It's NOT that God says, "You have the One Good Shepherd and all other authority, mentoring, teaching is now totally unnecessary – leave the kids to raise themselves – Jesus will shepherd them..." "

Some of us are called in our families, neighborhoods, local governments, work-places, church to be shepherds UNDER the Great Shepherd of the Sheep (Heb 13.20). And knowing what it is to be treated with tenderness and self-sacrifice, mercy and justice, we look to the Spirit to work those qualities into our leadership and service. We serve and lead people (like our kids) made in the image of God and therefore we don't fool around (Truly, Truly!) especially in the church: (here's Paul to the Ephesian Shepherds): "Be

on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20.28)

- 2) 2) Look to BE shepherded... by Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd and by His appointed under-shepherds. Keep a sense of expectation as He leads, heals, corrects, teaches, feeds you AND look for His human instruments to be in your life. Jacob at the end of his life: The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day” (Gen. 48.15)
- 3) Last, do you know what your kids need? A Good Shepherd. I mean for them to hear and recognize His Voice... to trust Him and receive all His benefits. This is what your family and friends... your not-yet-believing relatives NEED.

Let’s ask this Good Shepherd to rescue them and to lead them to the Fold of His keeping. He is worthy!

Q U O T E S

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil’s walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears.
And palms before my feet.

– G.K. Chesterton, “The Donkey”

My baby needs a shepherd
She’s lost out on the hill
Too late I tried to call her
When the night was cold and still
And I tell myself I’ll find her
But I know I never will
My baby needs a shepherd
She’s lost out on the hill

– Emmylou Harris, “My Baby Needs a Shepherd”, Track 6 from
the 2000 album, *Red Dirt Girl*