

“Recognizing The Shepherd”

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John 10:11-18 = Jesus, the Good Shepherd

One time Susan was substitute teaching at an elementary school. Among many other things she assisted a visually impaired boy, Andy



I'll call him. She liked him and made a connection with him. She was so impressed that she mentioned him as we were sharing our day's events at home.

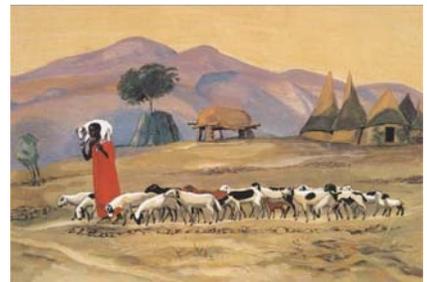
Months later, she was called back to sub at the same school. While she was leading a group of noisy students in the hallway, she passed Andy going the other way. Without seeing her, he shouted out, “Hello, Mrs. Losher.” He knew her voice, even thru the din in the hall.

When she later assisted him in his class again, one assignment was to identify one's own superpower and then write a haiku about it. She dutifully wrote down as he directed her celebrating his other senses as superabilities.

Jesus said in our text today:

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me”¹

Jesus' own words for today is that faithful followers of Jesus are equipped to discern true leaders from false.



Don't think this is ever easy. There are plenty of false leaders out there who are doing their darndest to convince us they represent God, Jesus, truth, justice, apple pie, the American way. But in fact they are ravenous wolves wanting to use us, abuse us and pick our bones.

Like young Andy, we need to discover our own superpower ~ a superpower for discerning Jesus' voice through all the cacophony of sounds demanding our constant attention, wanting to divert us, even destroy us, but instead discover within ourselves our superpower for discerning the spirits.

A not particularly discerning tourist was in the Holy Land. As the bus was stopped by a flock of sheep, he said “Hey, a shepherd” jumping out of the bus to video the person driving the sheep. When he returned to the bus, and the driver asked sarcastically, “You’re from the city, right?” “Yes, why do you ask?” “Because the shepherd leads from ahead using voice, but this person was driving from behind. That’s the butcher.”



Jesus said:

“When [the good shepherd] has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.”²



Interestingly enough in most sheep-raising countries today, the shepherd does follow the sheep. In stark contrast, Palestinian shepherds still lead ahead of their flocks with their voice.³ Indeed there is a fundamental difference between those who “lead” the sheep, and those who “drive” the sheep, between leaders today who “lead” by voice and example, and butchers who “drive.” Let those who have ears discern.

Shepherds who own their flocks know all their sheep, know each by name, protect them from all harm, would lay down life for the sheep. They lead from the front by voice and example.

In contrast, when the shepherd is not the owner of the flock, a hireling is not responsible for losses caused by predators. Therefore the hired hand has little motivation to protect the sheep; certainly no motivation whatsoever to risk life and limb to protect the sheep from predators.⁴ Jesus says:

“The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away ~ and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.”⁵

Just so our Good Shepherd, Jesus, leads from ahead, by voice, by example. All others, even some leading in his name, are, well, butchers. Their interest in us is other ways, to exploit, to manipulate, to destroy.

A word of caution: some hired hands turn out to be good shepherds. A West Texas rancher required some hired help. The only applicant was a teenage girl. “Do you have any recommendations? Have you worked for anyone I might know?” “No, not really. But I can sleep through a storm.”



Hardly satisfied with this or the appearance of the applicant, but having no choice, he hired the girl anyway.



Within days, a great thunderstorm blows up. The rancher looked out and thankfully sees no animals in the lot, the barns secure, the animals safe and fed, the girl asleep in the loft. She could sleep through a storm because her work was well done.

The Good Shepherd leads from ahead. The Good Shepherd can sleep through a storm.

The story depicted in the Oscar-winning movie *Schindler's List* is true. Oscar Schindler was much less than saintly, and yet... A German businessman, Schindler exploited a group of Jews in a factory during the Holocaust.



He gained trunkfuls of wealth by exploiting their labor. But in a surprising twist, as the war drags on, his conscience pricked, he takes that wealth and uses it to save that group of Jews.

In the dramatic scene, he is compiling the famous list dictating it to his Jewish secretary on a typewriter, name by name, each of a thousand women, men and children. He expended all he had to bring them to safety. Schindler, unlikely saint, took the role of a good shepherd.



“No equivocation. No qualifiers. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The good shepherd, in contrast to the hired hand, never abandons the flock entrusted to him.”⁶

There are times in our lives when we experience a stranger who cares for us in times of crisis and great need. In shock we cannot remember the name or face of the stranger who ministered to us. That stranger is Jesus, our Good Shepherd, if not in person, certainly an avatar.



Sometimes Jesus comes to care for us through the kindness of friends, neither nameless nor faceless. Yet with friends it is harder to recognize the face of Jesus in the familiar, to hear the voice of the Savior through familiar voices, but it is Jesus nonetheless.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. All other leaders are but hired hands. Jesus it is who leads from ahead. Jesus it is who can sleep through a storm. Jesus it is who lays down life for us.

A word of caution: for our next Senior Pastor at GPC, naturally we're searching for a leader who discerns a vision of the risen Christ, not a "driver" with other agendas, however attractive.

Ron Holloman pastor in Ft. Worth, had an encounter with a member after a sermon on the Good Shepherd in which it was pointed out that believers are the sheep in Jesus' analogy. The member stated his disappointment: "I'm no sheep." Knowing the member well, Ron Holloman responded: "That must mean you're a goat."

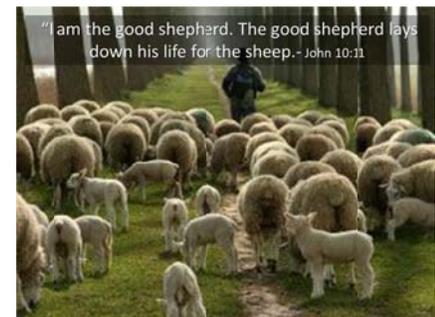


We really are the sheep in Jesus' words, sometimes foolish, often frivolous, willful, in need of guidance, in need of care, easily distracted, prone to wander after hirelings, false shepherds. That we are, but ultimately, we can be led out of all that ~ if we discover our superpower is to discern

the spirits, to hear only the voice of the Good Shepherd over all the distracting noise and competing voices of life.

Ultimately we are cared for, because Jesus is the Good Shepherd ~ the only one who really leads from ahead, by voice, by example; the only one who can sleep through a storm at sea; the only one who lays down life for us and all.

Our job as sheep is simple: heed his voice, follow his call, follow the good one, the righteous one, the one true, truly Good Shepherd. The one who has already laid down his life for us.



¹ John 10:14

² John 10:4

³ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, p. 181

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 182

⁵ John 10:12

⁶ cf. <http://pres-outlook.org/2018/04/4th-sunday-of-easter-april-22-2018/>