

## **“A Different Kind of Leader”**

**John 10:11-18; Psalm 23**

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Throughout much of Jesus’ public ministry, people struggled to understand who he was and what he was trying to accomplish. Nothing about him was typical or normal.

He grew up in a humble home in Nazareth where he became a carpenter like his father, Joseph. Around the age of thirty, he left home. He hung up his tools for a final time, quit building furniture and closed his shop.

He went to the Jordan River where he was baptized by the last Old Testament prophet, a desert-dweller by the name of John. Immediately following his baptism, he went on a retreat in the wilderness.

It was during this period of introspection that Jesus formulated his plans for the future, focusing primarily on what his priorities would be and how he was going to do the work God sent him to do.

When he left the wilderness, he did not go to Jerusalem to introduce himself to the ruling religious class in order to secure their blessing. Instead, he headed north to Galilee where he began calling ordinary people to follow him and become his disciples.

After calling a dozen men whose most distinguishing common trait was their un-attachment to the leadership structure in the Temple, Jesus walked into the homes and hearts of the everyday people who were struggling to survive in a world that constantly beat them down.

He respectfully listened to their stories and responded to them with mercy and grace. He made hope visible in a variety of ways, always inviting each person he touched and inspired to follow him in reaching out to others.

No, nothing about Jesus fit the traditional mold of a preacher, teacher or prophet. Neither did he come close to resembling what most religious people imagined the Messiah to be.

Truly, Jesus was mysterious, puzzling and difficult to understand. And he knew it.

**So, what did Jesus do?** From John's perspective, Jesus used metaphors to describe himself. These images, analogies, comparisons and symbols were meant to clear up his listeners' confusion and to help them place their confidence and trust in him.

Our attention this morning is drawn to one of those metaphors. "I am the good shepherd," Jesus said, not just once in our text but twice.

"The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So, when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. The wolf attacks the sheep and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They, too, will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from my Father." (John 10: 11-18)

You must understand people were accustomed to associating leaders in Jewish culture with shepherds. Abraham was a keeper of flocks. Moses was tending his father-in-law's sheep

when God called him into special service. David, the second and greatest king of Israel, was a shepherd boy when Samuel selected him to be Saul's successor.

Even God is pictured as a shepherd and the people as his flock, especially in the beloved 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

So, Jesus using a common metaphor for a leader in Israel, a shepherd, probably did not raise many eyebrows. However, his use of the descriptive word, good, had to arouse people's curiosity.

**Why did Jesus refer to himself as the Good Shepherd?** Obviously, he was drawing a contrast between him and some of the religious leaders in charge of the Temple.

Sadly, not all of them were good. Some were driven by unbridled greed, addicted to power and blinded by ambition, as they must have been in Ezekiel's day based upon what he wrote in 34:1-10. Their concern was for their own welfare and the preservation of their lavish lifestyles, not the plight of the people they were called to serve.

This broke Jesus' heart. He knew these selfish and corrupt religious leaders did not reflect the heart and nature of God, nor were they doing what they could to lift people out of despair. This was unacceptable to Jesus and he had to offer an alternative vision and voice.

"I am the good shepherd," Jesus said. Twice.

I am not here to take from you but to give to you. I am not here to hurt you but to heal your wounds. I am not here to ignore your hunger but to feed you. I am not here to scold you for going astray but to bring you home.

I am not here to throw you to the wolves but to protect you. I am not here to berate you for making mistakes but to forgive you. I am not here to shame you but to take away your guilt. I am not here to exploit you but to shield you from predators who want to take advantage of you.

I am not here to confuse you but to help you explore the mysteries of life and faith. I am not here to make you conform to others' expectations but to help you achieve your unique

potential. I am not here to burden you down with excessive rules and regulations but to lift you up so you can see your way to a better future.

And I know your name. But I know a whole lot more about you than your name.

I know what makes you anxious. I know what keeps you awake at night. I know what distracts you as you go about your daily duties. I know what robs you of your joy.

I know who has made you cry. I know who has deceived you. I know who has disappointed you. I know who has abused you. I know who has rejected you. I know who has replaced you with someone else. I know who you have lost and how lonely you feel.

I know what challenges you are facing. I know what dreams you are chasing. I know what plans you are making. I know how hopeful you are.

And I want to help you manage what you are dealing with and processing.

Today. Tomorrow. Forever.

Will you let me?

**My study of and meditation on this passage last week led me to two conclusions.**

First, something will always be missing in our lives until we experience a relationship with the kind of shepherd described in Psalm 23 and John 10:11-18. No one can do for us what the Good Shepherd offers to do, and no possession we own or yearn for can satisfy our longing for meaning, purpose, guidance, direction, peace and joy like Jesus can.

It doesn't mean others cannot walk alongside us and offer support and encouragement, as they surely do. However, even those who love us most are limited by what they can provide.

When fellow companions on our journey have reached that limit or dropped by the wayside, the Good Shepherd will continue to walk hand-in-hand with us. This reliable, trustworthy, compassionate and courageous companion will never leave our side.

The second conclusion I drew last week from this passage is this. Something will be missing in our relationships until we become a good shepherd and model Jesus' compassion, care and loyalty.

Healthy relationships require the leadership of good shepherds. At times, we must be that person and provide the kind of stable and steady leadership Jesus did.

When we do, we'll discover the more we give ourselves away in service to others in Jesus' name, the happier we'll be and the healthier our relationships will become.

Good shepherds know this.

Do you?