

Christ Presbyterian Church
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John Crosby
Jesus in His Own Words: I AM the Gate & Good Shepherd
John 10

We are talking this autumn about a God that seems to have many faces. Your idea of what God is makes a difference in the way that you follow or serve or don't. If you believe God is some invisible, omnipotent but unconcerned Being, then you are on your own; but if you believe as I was taught, or at least felt sometimes, that God is a cosmic scorekeeper up there keeping track of the two good things you do and the million bad things that I did, then you have a different view of God. Your view of God shapes how you respond. We said, why don't we ask God what He thinks, so for seven weeks we are trying to take the opportunity to listen to God say, "I am...." Seven times Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Way...." We are going to try to figure out who those men could be who have been turned into Hallmark cards for us.

When Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd," everybody smiles because it is like gentle Jesus, meek and mild, that postcard where He is carrying the little sheep home, but I think it meant something very different. I would love to get some of the juice of that back for you. It is particularly relevant because it is about selecting a leader. One of our prayers this morning was about selecting a leader in this election season. Who can I trust? Who do I want to follow? That is what the story of the Good Shepherd is about.

Jesus was in a land ruled by the Romans but where day-to-day affairs were taken over by the Vichy. Those of you who have studied history, remember the Vichy? They are the French people who sold out to the Nazis. Herod was a Vichy, ruling for the Romans, but day-to-day life was basically governed by the Pharisees. They were the ones who said, "Stop here," "Go there," "Do this," "Don't do that." Into that mix Jesus says, "We need a different kind of leader." In Matthew 9 it says,

³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

There were a lot of leaders, a lot of people vying to be leaders, but people felt harassed. Any of you feel harassed this week? I did. Did you feel lost or helpless or tired or discouraged, unsure of where to go next? Jesus looked at us and said, "You need a different kind of leader, a shepherd." John, chapter 10,

10 "Very truly I tell you Pharisees....

Any time Jesus says "you Pharisees" or says "Pharisees," it is trouble. Jesus never turns to the Pharisees and says, "You guys are looking really good today. Hey, I think we're on the same page about this. You and me, Pharisees." When He turns to the Pharisees, it is to make a

contrast and say they are doing something wrong. “I’m telling you the truth, you Pharisees....

...anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Jesus is saying to the crowd and especially to the Pharisees in the front row, “Hey, there are bad leaders as well as good leaders. Pharisees, these people who have come to listen to Me, they are Mine, not yours. They are Mine.” A fight for leadership has started.

⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him....

like the crowds follow Jesus,

...his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who have come before me....

Pharisees!

...are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.

“They are listening to Me.”

⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy....

Pharisees!

...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

“I have come that they might have life in all of its abundance.” True leadership. John Ortberg says, “The hope of the Gospel is not that you just get into heaven after you die, but that you may have life, here and now, and have it with abundance.” Different than you had before you started to follow the Shepherd. Jesus said,

¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming....

or the Romans, or Herod, the false shepherd,

...he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

The key test of the shepherd is, what happens when things get tough for the *leader*? The key test is what happens in bad times? Will you run away? Will you make excuses? Will you blame other people or will you hang in? Will you protect and lead even at great personal cost? This made a lot of sense to the Jews because all through the Old Testament, they had talked about the king, their leader, as a shepherd so when Jesus starts to say, "I am the Shepherd," He is saying, "I am the true King. I want you to listen to the contrast between the way I, Jesus, lead and the way the Pharisees lead." Like the leaders of Israel in the Old Testament, Ezekiel, chapter 34,

... 'Thus says the Lord God, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"³ You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock.

It was different from our day where most sheep are raised for slaughter. Back then most sheep were raised year after year after year for the wool they provided. Shepherds developed a relationship with them. They became part of the family."

⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

Pharisees, Herod, Romans, you are bad leaders.

²³ Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them. He will feed them and be their shepherd.

A different kind of king, King Jesus. Back to the Gospel of John. Jesus says,

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd....

Now Jesus is claiming to be King.

...I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Then he says,

¹⁶ 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.

Huge promise. This isn't just about the Jews. It's about everybody. "I have other flocks." It's about everybody in other flocks, but this is offensive to the Jews because as bad as things are, they believe that they are the only chosen people. God has chosen them, and they have forgotten that God chose them so they could bless the whole world. Now Jesus wants to bring everybody in from the cold, and the Jews don't like that. Verse 19,

¹⁹ The Jews who heard these words were again divided.²⁰ Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"²¹ But others said, "These are not

the sayings of someone possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

They fought among each other and they fought with Jesus. That conflict continues and a couple of months later Jesus said,

²⁶...but you do not believe....

Pharisees, you don't believe.

...because you are not my sheep.

From where you sit today, could there be any scarier news on the planet? "You are not My sheep. I don't know you." "Harriet, c'mon. Joe, come on in. Oh, back there in the back. Come on forward. I'll go find Charlie. He's lost." "You, I don't know you. Go away." Whoa!

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Then the key verse,

³⁰ I and the Father are one."

It's tied together. Jesus is close to the Father. They love each other. "I and the Father are one." Jesus is close to the sheep. "I am the Good Shepherd. I will lay down my life for them." Sometimes in the Old Testament, the Shepherd was supposed to be God. Other times He was supposed to be the descendent of David. Now the two come together, right? Jesus is the descendant of David. Jesus says, "I and the Father are one" and "I am your Shepherd." I believe that triggered His death. I think they killed Him because He wanted to be a different kind of King. I believe He saw that the people back then needed a shepherd. I listen to your lives and I share your hearts and I think you need a shepherd also, because you are a sheep today. You are a sheep in hostile territory. Psalm 100 says,

³ Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

In Isaiah 53, it says,

⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray....

The role of a sheep is very simple. Simple, but not easy. All you have to do is recognize the right voice. There are a lot of different voices out there saying, "Follow me." "Follow me." "Follow me." There is an Obama voice and a Romney voice and other voices calling out for you to follow them. Then there is one voice underneath all the yelling that says, "Follow Me. Follow Me home."

How many of you--this is just an illustration--how many of you have picked up the phone and

even before the person said who they were, you knew? Especially if it was Mom, right? Mom calls and wherever you are, whatever you are doing, you know exactly who it is on the other end of the phone. For thirteen years she calls. Moms do this, and I recognize the voice and I'm going to listen. That is what Jesus is saying. "Come to know my voice." You are sheep.

Laura and I were in Scotland for our 20th anniversary. I surprised her with a trip to Scotland. I know why I'm saying this. She's not here. All over the world the woman takes pictures of sheep. Irish sheep are somehow different from Scottish sheep, are somehow different from Chilean sheep, are somehow different from Wisconsin sheep. They all look like sheep to me. This is a woman who loves sheep. She still thinks that lamb chops come from Lunds in those little plastic wrappings. One morning we are in Scotland at a bed and breakfast, and she gets up early and goes outside on the grounds where there is a little sheep pen. All the sheep are in there being such very Scottish sheep. Cute. She sticks her hand inside the pen and starts going, "Here, sheepie, sheepie," and all of the sheep move away from the crazy lady. All of a sudden behind her, she said, "I hear a voice. 'Ah, lass.' I'm going, 'Here, sheepie, sheepie,' and the voice goes 'Pa, Pa, come here.'" One of the sheep trots over and starts licking Laura's fingers. She turns around and there is this old gentleman standing there. "How did you do that?" Laura asks him. "Ah, I know'em. That's Pa. He's a little daft. I know him and he knows me, the shepherd. Pa, come here." Mary, Joan, Jim, Tony. God knows each one of our names.

It is very simple to be a sheep, but it is not very easy. How well do you think you recognize Jesus' voice? How are you hearing Jesus speak to you when all the other voices in your life are pulling you in different directions, whether you are in school or at home or at work or wherever you are, when you hear the voice? We are going to talk about that in the weeks ahead so I'm not going to go into it now. But how do you hear the voice? Let me give you just one hint? You will know that it is the voice of the Shepherd if you hear the Shepherd saying, "Come." You will know it is *not* the voice of the Shepherd if hear the shepherd saying, "*Change* and then come." You see, that is the religious shepherd. "Change, get your act together, and then come to church." Jesus says it is the other way around. "Come. Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden. Come, scattered sheep. I'll come and get you. Come. We can talk about change in the morning. We can talk about the healthy kind of life you've always wanted, but come."

What is your God saying to you? Because so often the church has got that wrong, doesn't it? We've said, "Change and then come." The truth is, the people inside the building are just as lost as the people outside the building. We are just as much dumb sheep as the dumb sheep out there, "Change and then you can come." I heard a story about that the other day. A woman who is in a hurry is driving her car and she tailgates the guy in front of her. The guy comes to an intersection and when the light turns yellow, he hits the brakes and stops. The woman behind him goes ballistic. She honks her horn at him and yells her frustration in no uncertain terms. She rants and gestures and while she is in mid-rant, someone taps on her window. She sees a policeman standing there and rolls down her window. "M'am, I'm sorry. Would you get out of the car, please?" "What have I done wrong, officer?" "Would you just get out of the car for a second?" And he ends up taking her down to the station. A couple of hours later he comes to the door of the waiting room and says, "M'am, I'm really sorry. Here is your driver's license, and here is the title to your car. I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, using bad gestures, and bad language. I noticed the *What would Jesus do?* bumper sticker, the *Choose life* license plate holder, the *Follow me to Sunday School* sign on your window, and the fish emblem on your trunk so I thought you must have stolen some Christian's car."

That is the world I live in, where it's hard to tell the good sheep from the bad sheep. We all need the Shepherd's voice. In the modern world, it is us, the church, who have heard the Shepherd's voice. We are the designated under-shepherds. Rich was pretending like he was an under-shepherd for the children today, trying to teach them to hear the voice of the Shepherd. Our calling is to go out to other people, the scattered, the harassed, the lonely, and talk to them about the Shepherd, not pretending we know all the answers. It is certainly not to say, "Change and then you can come and meet my friend, Jesus." Our calling is to go out to them with the voice of the Shepherd, calling them home to safety, calling them home to love. That is the voice they long for. That is the role you have, to become a person who has heard the voice strong enough that you want the people around you to hear it too, wherever you are on the journey, whether you are lost or afraid or you are winning the race, whether you are weary or hurting or you are finally getting it right, whether you are feeling embattled and you are right at the edge of disaster because you are about to lose the house or the job or the marriage or your beloved's life. Whether you are walking right on the outskirts of the valley of the shadow of death or you are celebrating the banquet of life, you need to hear the voice of the Shepherd saying, "Come to Me. We'll worry about the change later. Come to Me."

I'd like us to do a spiritual discipline together for just a minute. The most famous part of the whole Bible talks about a Shepherd, right? You already know where I am going. I'd like to change one word in the most famous part of the Bible so that it comes home to you. I'd like to have us say it together, and we will stop at some places and make it our own. Let's together talk about the leader we believe in. Together,

23 The Lord...

The Lord *Jesus*... I heard you start to say is The Lord is my Shepherd, but one word is added right there. Let's try it again.

23 The Lord...

Jesus...

is my shepherd;

I shall not want.

² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.

³ He restores my soul;

Are you like me? My soul needs to be refreshed, restored. All too quickly, the water runs dry or it gets stagnant. How about you? Does your soul need to be restored? Listen. Listen for the call of the Shepherd.

³ He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil;

For You are with me;

God, there are people here who feel the wings of death on them or the ones they love, or on the death of a career or a reputation or a relationship, or the death of a dream of children. When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we always fear evil unless we feel that You are close beside us. Come to my sisters and my brothers here and remind us that You are with us.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

There is supposed to be more to life. God, You promised that there is more to life, and yet when we just hunger after more, we don't feel like our heads overflow. I pray with my brothers and sisters here that they would find the things in life that truly content them, and take them from the hand of the Good Shepherd and pass them on to the sheep around them.

Again,

You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

Lord Jesus, we need to learn to hear Your voice because like sheep, like dumb little sheep, we don't know what's good for us. Our pride or our fear or our desires often send us away from Your voice. I pray that You will speak in ways that we cannot mistake and that we will walk toward Your voice, toward Your love, toward home. In the Name of the Father, and the Son, our Shepherd, and the Spirit, we pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.