

A Shepherd To Lead Us
John 10:1-21

Leadership. We all want good leadership. Good leaders to lead us in and out of green pastures. We vote hoping to elect it, we apply for jobs hoping to work for it, and we go to school hoping to be educated by it. But we do not always find it. The trust we place in our leaders can be broken. So what are we to do? John 10 holds the answer.

Look at the picture Jesus gives us in John 10: this portrait of a shepherd caring for his sheep. The shepherd would lead his sheep out to distant areas and stay there for days. Being a good shepherd he created a temporary corral, a pen to keep the sheep in when they were not grazing. Using the crude stones of the field a shepherd could quickly put together such a structure and at night he would lay his body down in the opening of this corral making himself the door. No sheep could wonder away at night unless it stepped over the sleeping shepherd and no wolf could come in to do harm without waking the shepherd. He is the gate.

Do you see what's happening here? More than any other duty the goal of the shepherd is to protect the sheep. This is how you know a good shepherd from a bad shepherd. But how do you know that he or she is a good shepherd? You know by looking at the sheep.

From the teaching this morning, in John 10 there are a few questions and few answers we might consider.

The first question is: **What are the needs of a sheep?** I propose that the answer to the question is: protection. Jesus says that predators are always trying to get into the sheep pen, trying to devour them: coyotes, bears, wolves, or cougars. The sheep need someone to watch over them, and provide protection.

And not only do they need protection from predators, they need protection from themselves. Sheep are some of the dumbest animals in all the animal kingdom. They're creatures of habit who graze the same hills until they become desert wastes.

They're creatures of bad hygiene, polluting their grazing area until its run over with disease and parasite. Sheep live in their own filth. They're heavy coats become weighed down with mud, manure, burrs and debris.

And when they lie down they can roll over. Once on their backs they cannot right themselves unless a shepherd comes and puts them back on their feet. To their own destruction, they become burdened with things.

Protection is the first task of the shepherd because sheep by nature are followers. And, truth be told, many of us are followers, too. We think of ourselves as leaders, but outside of parenthood we are rarely placed in positions of ultimate care over others.

Jesus recognizes that we are, by nature, followers; that we need people over us to care for us. Sheep, and many of us, are followers who need the protection of a Shepherd.

The second question is this: **who will be given the responsibility to care for these creatures?** I propose that the answer to the question is: the shepherd. But there are good shepherds and there are bad shepherds.

If the shepherd is gentle, kind, intelligent, brave and selfless in his devotion to his flock, the sheep will thrive. If the shepherd is cruel, inattentive, haphazard, and selfish the, sheep will struggle, suffer and starve. Their hardship will know no end.

In verses 11 and 12 Jesus contrasts a good shepherd with a temporary shepherd. Jesus says that these hired hand shepherds are not fully committed to their cause because they don't own the sheep.

It's kind of like owning a car or renting a car. Most of us who rent a car don't take it to a car wash before we turn it back in. Sure, we take out our papers, coffee cups, receipts and such, but we don't vacuum, wash, or wax the car when we hand over the keys. That's the kind of thing we do when we own a car.

Who puts in the most hours, the owner of a business or the worker? Works the hardest, the owner or the worker? Worries the most? Cares the deepest? It's the owner, not the worker.

The shepherd, who owns the flock, is the good shepherd who has the well being of the sheep foremost in his or her mind.

And the last question is this: **What are the traits of an effective shepherd?** I propose that the answer to the question is: well, there are many traits that could be listed.

I like what Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "In order to be a leader a man must have followers. And to have followers, a man must have their confidence. Hence the supreme quality of a leader is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, on a football field, in an army, or in an office.

If a man's associates find him guilty of phoniness, if they find that he lacks forthright integrity, he will fail. His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose."¹

Looking through several books and quotes about effective leadership I came up with a list of traits. These five were present in most of the list:

1. Courage - Leaders expressed ideas to help others improve, in spite of personal risk or opposition.
2. Non-conformity - Simply swimming with the tide leaves you nowhere.
3. Foresight - The ability to look ahead and see what's coming.
4. Steadiness – Having patience and persistence despite failures and obstacles.
5. Righteousness - The willingness to do the right thing and speak the truth.

These are all marks of a true leader but none seemed willing to go as far as Jesus did. He always had a way of summing up the meaning of a thing.

- He took the Ten Commandments and said, "Love God and love your neighbor" and you will fulfill the law.
- He took the complicated issue of divorce and said, "God hates divorce" so don't do it.
- He took the disciples question about how to pray and said, "When you pray, say: Our Father, hallowed be thy name."

So he looks out at the people and he sees that they have had bad shepherds. That the nation has been put in danger because of these leaders and he says, "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." And you can't argue with that.

That's true leadership.

We all want a leader. A shepherd to lead us. Someone we can trust. Someone who has our best interest at heart. Someone who will not disappoint. I offer you Christ. He is the Good Shepherd.

May God bless the sheep in the church and those who shepherd. Amen.

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Bits & Pieces, September 15, 1994, p. 4