



April 22, 2018 - Shepherds sent by the Good Shepherd **Given by Rev. Mattei**

The life of faith we live today, in truth the kind of life in general we live today is fruit of many historical, environmental factors. Pastors, teachers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and coaches: so many people significantly influence our life and faith as we are always “becoming” and growing into who God created us to be. It takes a special kind of love, engagement, and patience to grow as human beings over a long period of time. Personal reflection and people’s feedback also contribute tremendously to our human growth. By paying attention to influential persons’ lived examples, direct support and encouragement and even through constructive observations we are who we are today. In my life, many people helped me on my journey. Because I was able to perceive their loving kindness toward me I could hear their words, even their hard ones. I would take them in, cherish them and reflect on them and eventually grow because of them.

Jesus presents himself as the Good Shepherd.¹ He is thinking of the Holy Scriptures’ shepherd tradition that conveyed a challenging meaning: to be a shepherd means to sacrifice yourself for the welfare of the community, to give one’s life so that others may live. Jesus qualifies his claim by the fact that he knows the sheep and they know him (vv.11 and 15b); he knows the Father and the Father knows him (v.15a); and he has concern for other sheep that are not of this fold (v.16): they ought to hear his voice and be part of the fold, too. His willingness and readiness to lay his life for those who belong to him reveal the mutual love between him and the Father (vv.17-18.) To know God is to love God. As the late New Testament scholar and theologian Marcus Borg explains: “Jesus was a person radically centered in God, empowered by that relationship, and filled with God’s passion for the world—a passion that led to his execution and vindication.”²

Knowledge has several layers. Through observation and critical analysis one has a good chance to know facts. A deeper layer is to know the difference between personal opinion and objective truth. A deeper layer yet is to know to be known, which is intimate and relational, connective, freeing and transformative. The openness of the heart to the

¹ John 10:11 and again at v. 14. In Luke 18:19 and Mark 10:18 only God is truly good.

² Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (HarperSanFrancisco: 2006), 304.

Ultimate Other facilitates the experience of being deeply loved, not only in spite of our weaknesses but mostly because of our weaknesses. It's then that we know the voice of the Shepherd who is ready to lay down his life for us. We cannot forget that voice once we have heard it. Even in our foolishness, when we insist on our ways or when we resist change because we are afraid of losing ourselves, even when we choose not to pay attention or to run away, even then we know whose voice it is.

Familiarity with that voice speaks of intimacy, meaning, identity, loyalty, consistency, and communion in spirit for a shared reality: in Jesus' words, the fold, the kingdom of God, life eternal or salvation. And this reality is available to all: Jesus' mission is universal. He shows concern for all people and as he prays in Gethsemane prior to his arrest he wants all people, even those who will believe through the words and testimony of the apostles (John 17:18-20) to be one in him and in the Father. The disciples are given the privilege to pass on the message and be the living channels of that Voice.

The Good Shepherd's model of leadership is not limited to the ministry of the Pastor of a church. It inspires concern for all people, indeed for all of creation, to all the followers of Jesus themselves. Those Jesus called and grouped around himself for practical teaching in how to live a life in the Spirit of God he also sent to bring the same teaching to the rest of the world: the Disciples are sent as Apostles, leaders who lay down their life to shepherd people to the Realm of God. This is evangelism, the announcement of the Good News.³

Because the word "evangelism" is so loaded it carries negative correlations and some Christians are immediately turned off and lose interest in knowing what that is all about. But evangelism is Jesus' desire to let the Easter message, "He is Risen," known to the ends of the Earth. It stems from Jesus' passion for all people and his love for the Father. It involves all of us as disciples of Jesus and it requires much more than an intellectual assent. It is the fruit of a personal encounter with the Risen Lord, an encounter that transforms one from the inside out and invites one to a deeper internal journey of self-discovery. As one tastes union with one's deepest Self one desires a faithful prayer life for the purpose of maintaining a constant awareness and worship of God. Grace thus received (the sure perception of being intimately known, loved and forgiven) compels one to speak and let others know: a life of grace is available to all.⁴ This, in my view, is the core of evangelism.

And so, we seek opportunities to learn, to study, to experience, to grow. We spend time in prayer for ourselves and for others: we pray for ourselves that the Lord may send to

³ 1 John 3:16-24

⁴ 1 Cor 9:17

us shepherds and teachers of the faith so we may experience the Word and recognize the Voice of Christ spoken to us; we pray that we may grow in the Spirit in union with God and others; that we may grow in the desire to bring the Message to others;⁵ we pray that our life becomes an open Message to others; we pray that the Lord may give us clarity of where we may bring healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. We also pray for others, that all may hear the Saving News; we pray for visitors and for an opportunity to share with them in Christian fellowship. We pray for those who haven't heard the Message of Grace⁶ that they may find us an accurate image of the Good Shepherd to follow.

⁵ Romans 10:14-15

⁶ Matthew 9:36-38