

“Gripped”

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A Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Lent, continuing a series on John 10.

John 10:22-31

March 11, 2018

Read the Scriptures by clicking [here](#).

When Jesus calls on us to follow him, what is he asking us into?

When Jesus describes his people as sheep for whom he is the shepherd, what is he saying about us? About himself? About who we are with him?

II

Jesus had been talking about shepherds and sheep. Everyone listening knew this was coded way to talk about kings and the people. And when you talk about a new king — especially during the Hanukkah festival which was all about overthrowing tyrants and restoring God’s People; especially when there was a weak king on the throne; especially when God’s People were being crushed by tyrants — when you talk about being a new “Shepherd,” people wonder.

Jesus has been saying that he is the Right Shepherd.

- He is the right-acting Shepherd, who comes honestly to his sheep.
- He is the right-caring Shepherd, who tends the sheep.
- He is the right-loving Shepherd, who knows the sheep.
- He is the right-leading Shepherd, who leads the sheep.
- He is the right-guarding Shepherd, who himself is the gate keeping the sheep from wandering out, and predators from getting in.
- He is the right-giving Shepherd, who sacrifices his own life to save the sheep because they are his family.

Jesus says he is this Beautiful Shepherd, this Ideal Shepherd, the Good Shepherd of God’s People.

People are hearing him. Some are excited. Some are fearful. Some are angry. Some are confused. *What sort of Shepherd is he claiming to be? Not like any shepherd-king-champion-saviour we’ve ever imagined!*

They press around him, demanding a straight answer. *Are you the Messiah? The Christ? Our God-given King and Saviour?*

Jesus' answer is . . . *"I've already told you. I've already shown you. But you have not believed."*

Why have they not believed? *"Because you have not become my people, my flock."*

That does not seem to answer the question.

III

Actually, Jesus' answer seems to get it backwards. *"You have not followed me, so you have not believed me"* is what he says. Shouldn't it be the other way around? Believe Jesus, and then you will follow him. Trust Jesus, and then you will belong to him.

Believe first, then become.

First scrutinize. Be sceptical. Examine what Jesus says, look at what he does, probe the evidence, weigh the options, figure Jesus out. Don't you do this first? If you become convinced enough that Jesus is who he says, then you decide to follow him, trust him, give yourself to him, let him be your shepherd.

Don't you first evaluate, and then participate?

You're buying a car. Look at your options. Weigh the features. Then negotiate the deal and make the purchase.

You're doing scientific research. Suggest a hypothesis. Examine the evidence. Then form your theory and publish.

You're casting a ballot. Listen to the candidates. Scrutinize their promises. Assess their character. Then vote.

You're diving into water. Do you know how to swim? Yes. Is it deep enough? Yes. Are there sharks? No. Then, jump.

Many things work that way. Many choices, decisions, commitments and conclusions are made wisely only after we first know. Then we go.

IV

But other things work differently.

Having children. If it is on purpose, they've probably thought about it, talked about it,

decided on it. But they can't really know what it is to be a parent until they already are, can they?

Getting married. Is this the one? Are we right for each other? Will it work? I encourage them to think about it, before slipping on the ring. But I know you only begin to understand matrimony after the "I do"s.

Becoming best friends. You like similar things. You enjoy each other. You trust each other. But when do you know that? Before the friendship? Or as you've go along?

What makes buying a car, doing research, voting or diving different from becoming parents, getting married, being friends?

That second list, they are all relationships. And they are very significant relationships.

There is something about an important relationship between people that is always going to be undetermined, unknown, uncontrollable, and ongoing.

With many decisions, we evaluate, then participate. But with important relationships, we can only evaluate as we participate.

With many decisions, we know then we go. With relationships, we can only know as we go.

Commitment comes first. It's not blind. You do some thinking and some feeling about it. But it is after you have made the commitment to belong that the conviction can really grow.

Jesus does not ask us to draw a conclusion.

He calls us into a relationship with him. That's when we discover, more and more, that he really is our Shepherd. But a shepherd, a king, a ruler unlike any we've ever imagined.

V

This Shepherd is inviting us into a relationship.

In this relationship, we hear his voice. Not because he is slick-talking, or charismatic, or inspirational. Jesus might be those things, but that's not it. What Jesus communicates, in his words and his actions, speaks right to us. We delight in hearing him. That's why he is a Shepherd like no other.

In this relationship, our Shepherd knows us. To him, you are not a statistic in a report, a face in the crowd. Your Shepherd knows who you are, what you are about, whatever it is that you are carrying with you. Jesus knows you deeper than you know yourself. That's why he is a Shepherd like no other.

So you trust him. You follow him. Don't picture it so much as him leading the parade, with us traipsing along behind. It's more like we are walking around with him, doing things with him. We are being re-shaped, each of us in the core of our being, as we do our life with him. That's why he is a Shepherd like no other.

He is life. Deepest life. Fullest life. Forever life. Jesus came to us for life, abundant life. His abundance becomes part of us as we are with him. No other shepherd can give life.

We can never perish. The word means to be "utterly destroyed, ended, ruined, abolished." It's not happening. We will walk through the valley of the shadow of death, but death's power to destroy? Jesus disarmed death when he lay down his life for us. No other shepherd can keep you from perishing.

VII

He hold us.

Jesus promises: no one will snatch, plunder, seize, thief his sheep from his hand.

Never.

Never ever.

You are gripped by Jesus.

Listen to what that means. The life you have in him does not depend on how well you follow him. Follow him, yes. That's his call. But it is not your following that holds you to your Shepherd.

The life you have in him does not depend on how well you listen to him. Listen, yes. What he says and what he does are your treasure. But it is not your listening that holds you to your Shepherd.

Your life — abundant, deep, full, forever — does not depend on your feeble hold on Jesus.

It's his firm grip on you that matters. And he holds you, like no Shepherd can.

But doesn't Jesus quickly add that it's God the Father's hand from which no one can snatch the sheep. Which hand is it, Jesus' or God his Father's?

"I am the Father are one," says Jesus.

That's why he is your Shepherd.

This is the Good News of Jesus. Amen.