

## **I Am the Good Shepherd**

John 10:11 – 18

*God wants me to have a \$65 million private jet. And He wants you to help. My old jet is 20 years old and just won't do anymore. I need a new jet to "safely and swiftly share the Good News of the Gospel worldwide."*<sup>1</sup>

This was Pastor Creflo Dollar's pitch to his congregations in Atlanta, Georgia in 2015. Dollar's website said, "We are believing for 200,000 people to give contributions of 300 US dollars or more to turn this dream into a reality – and allow us to retire the aircraft that served us well for many years."<sup>2</sup>

What is even *more* unbelievable than Pastor Dollar's request, is that he *received* the money for the private jet - \$65 million. And now, the Gospel has the ability to go everywhere around the world – via a private jet.

We know of – and hear of – leaders who make requests that are *so* audacious that we simultaneously cringe *and* feel impressed. Who would make such a pitch, unless he or she believed it would come true? These leaders are bold, risky, charismatic, attractive, and influential. They've got something to say, and people *will* listen. It is no great shock that these leaders bring with them a band of followers who will dedicate their lives to following them.

In our Western culture, we hear a *lot* about leadership. We hear about what makes for effective leadership, the various styles of leadership, models of healthy and unhealthy leadership, self-care for those in leadership, and the list goes on.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/03/14/jesus-wants-me-to-have-this-jet.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://s2smagazine.com/2015/03/15/pastor-creflo-dollar-asks-members-to-fund-65-million-private-jet/>

What we *don't* often hear about is followership, though we are *all* followers. Think about it. (Pause between each.) Who are your role models, your mentors, those you trust to give you good advice, your favorite authors, family members, political leaders?

We *all* follow. Likely, you recognized at least one person from the above list that you follow in some respect or another. These leaders guide and give meaning to our experiences. These are people we can trust, that we want to emulate. These are the people whose opinions matter most to us. We hope that they will think we are worthy, good protégés. And if we fail to impress them, or if they fail us, we can be *devastated*.

In our Gospel text this morning, we find ourselves in the middle of a conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day. The conversation is tense and the leaders are divided over whether Jesus is demon-possessed and raving mad, or not.

In the previous chapter, Jesus healed a blind man. Instead of celebrating his healing or praising God, the man's neighbors and the religious leaders argue over whether or not the miracle actually took place, and proceed to argue over who Jesus is. They decide to throw the man out.

The religious leaders are upset about this whole ordeal. *If Jesus in fact did heal this man born blind, why would he heal on the day of rest? Why couldn't he have waited a day and healed when it was legal? Did he heal on the day of rest to challenge their authority? How dare he! Their authority is from God, so this man must be from the devil!*

Jesus says to them, “I am the good shepherd. 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. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep” (Jn 10:11 – 13).

Jesus does not debate the religious leaders; he simply tells them who *he* is – and who *they* are. The religious leaders were to shepherd God’s people, to care for them and to protect them. And instead of caring for and protecting the sheep, they cared for them when it benefited them most, and ran at the first sign of trouble. Instead of caring for the man born blind, they accused him and threw him out when they sensed their authority was in question. Like a hired hand, they saw the wolf coming, abandoned the sheep, and ran away. They ran away because they didn’t care for the sheep.

Jesus, on the other hand, is the good shepherd, the owner of the sheep. Instead of protecting his life at the first sign of trouble, he “lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11b). He does the very opposite of the hired hand; he will risk his life and *die* for his sheep.

Jesus continues, “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” (Jn 10:14 – 15).

There is a common understanding that sheep are not very intelligent animals, and this would be correct. Sheep often wander off and find themselves in

trouble. They can't help it – they're just not very smart. But, sheep *do* know the voice of the shepherd.

There is a story of a Norwegian shepherd who got sick. While he was away from the sheep, the sheep too got sick. They wandered around. When the shepherd returned, he called to the sheep, and the sheep ran to him and stood right in front of him.<sup>3</sup> The sheep know the shepherd and know the voice of the shepherd.

A man went to visit a flock of sheep. He wondered if the sheep would follow his voice if he imitated the voice of the shepherd. He did the best imitation he could, and the sheep did not move.<sup>4</sup> The sheep know the voice of the shepherd and follow his voice *only*.

The religious leaders of the day sought to be shepherds of God's people, and expected the sheep to follow. But they were the hired hands and did not care for the sheep – and the sheep knew it.

When Jesus came, his sheep knew him and they knew his voice. They knew they could trust him, and that he would lay down his life for them.

My dad was home on break during his first year of seminary. He was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, ready to take on the world. He went to his family's church, and as an expectant pastor, greeted the parishioners of Finland, MN.

He smelled alcohol on a man's breath. *What in the world?! This man was at church! What was he doing drinking before church!?* Dad knew the people of Finland were a tougher crowd, coal workers and loggers, *but couldn't they leave the bottle alone for one morning?*

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Nestingen, *CrossTalk*, 4/17/18.

<sup>4</sup> Nestingen, 4/17/18.

Disgusted, he joined his family for Sunday supper. He thought he would commiserate with his dad, the pastor, and told him about the man with alcohol on his breath. *I don't know if I'd want him in my church*, he said. Grandpa paused and *glared* at my dad, disgusted with him. *Those are my kind of people*. You could hear a pin drop. Grandpa *never* got mad, but he got mad at contempt. *Those are my kind of people*.

This is what Jesus, the good shepherd, does – he cares so deeply for his sheep, that he calls them *his kind of sheep, his kind of people*, and then he lays down his life for his sheep.

Dear friends, as you and I walk through this life, we will follow many people. Some of these people we will count on to protect and care for us, and they will abandon us. But that's not what Jesus does. He says, "I know that you belong to me and I belong to you." He has your name written on his hands.<sup>5</sup> Jesus is the good shepherd, who lays down his life for you, his sheep. You are his. He knows you and you know his voice. His voice is the one which leads you in love and repentance, to care for the outsider, to speak the truth in love. His voice is true and he is faithful. May the good shepherd lead you in paths of righteousness and restore your soul. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Nestingen, 4/17/18.