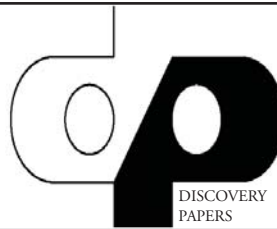




SHEPHERD OF THE HEART



Catalog No. 20140202
John 10
23rd Message
Scott Grant
February 2, 2014

Joseph Merrick, an Englishman who lived toward the end of the nineteenth century, suffered from a terribly disfiguring disease. People were horrified by his appearance. On at least one occasion, he was severely beaten by his father. The only consistent work he ever found was as a human curiosity, the star of a freak show. The showmen named Merrick “The Elephant Man” and advertised him as “Half-a-Man and Half-an-Elephant.” His manager took him on a tour of Europe but robbed him and abandoned him in Belgium. He lived in the shadows, his heart unknown.

Merrick’s plight was particularly excruciating. Yet, how many of us have been beaten, if not physically then emotionally; exploited, for our usefulness; robbed, at least of our innocence; and abandoned, left alone in a coldly indifferent world? How many of us, even those of us with close friendships, feel more or less unknown? Is there anyone who knows our hearts and therefore can speak to our hearts? If so, is it possible for us to hear that voice?

In John 10, Jesus speaks.

Shepherd of the sheep

John 10:1-6:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ²But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

In his figure of speech, Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees who opposed him, identifies himself as the shepherd of the sheep, who enters the sheepfold by the door, over

against a thief and robber, who sneaks in to the sheepfold. Jesus doesn’t identify who plays the part of the thief and robber, but Pharisees, shepherds of the synagogue, have just expelled one of their sheep, a blind man whom Jesus healed. It would seem that they are the thief/robber.

The sheep’s familiarity with the shepherd is such that they recognize—and trust—his voice and follow where he leads. The blind man whom Jesus healed heard Jesus’ voice, believed that he was the Son of Man, and even worshiped him. The man had been in the fold of the Pharisees, but once he became aware that they weren’t interested in the truth, he challenged them, with predictable results. After he was expelled from the synagogue, the Pharisees became “strangers” to him, and one who belongs to the fold of Jesus will not follow strangers. Indeed, “they do not know the voice of strangers.”

The Pharisees, however, don’t understand Jesus. Jesus is the light of the world, but the Pharisees are blind. They can’t see that Jesus is the light. They can’t even understand him. They aren’t his sheep. Trying to help them understand, Jesus changes the figure of speech.

Door of the sheep

John 10:7-10:

So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Now Jesus is the door of the sheep, but really, he’s still the shepherd, because the shepherd would lie down at night at the entryway to the sheep pen to protect the sheep. Now “all who came before” him are thieves and robbers, not only the Pharisees Jesus is speaking to but also false Messiahs and other leaders, both revolutionaries who take up arms against Rome and those who hold on to power by collaborating with Rome. All such leaders seek not to

bless the sheep but to profit from them: “the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”

As the door, Jesus enables the sheep who enter his pen to be “saved,” protected from would-be destroyers, but also to go out and “find pasture” to be nourished. In fact, Jesus came, as the shepherd/door so that his sheep may “have life and have it abundantly.” Safe from harm, with plenty of food: that’s life. It is enough. In fact, it’s more than enough. Nothing can possibly harm the sheep, and they have more than enough to eat. The sheep don’t simply survive; they thrive.

The good shepherd

John 10:11-18:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Jesus is not only the shepherd/door of the sheep; he is also the “good” shepherd. As such, he lays down his life for the sake of the sheep, sacrificing his own life so that they might be safe from wolves, so to speak. On the other hand, the hired hand, like the thief and robber, is more committed to his own welfare and saves his own life when danger is near, leaving the sheep at the mercy of the wolf.

Who are the sheep that are in Jesus’ fold? They’re Jews who listen to his voice. Now Jesus says he has “other sheep that are not of this fold,” Gentiles, whom he must bring into the fold. Note that he doesn’t envision shepherding two folds: one for Jews and one for Gentiles. No, he is the shepherd of one fold, which includes both Jews and Gentiles, and now “every tribe and language and people

and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

Jesus doesn’t earn the Father’s love by laying down his life for the sheep; no, the Father’s love for Jesus is evident in that he lays down his life for the sheep. It is also evident in that Jesus takes up his life again. After all, what good to the sheep is a dead shepherd? Jesus here envisions his resurrection. Remarkably, Jesus says that he has “authority” to take up his life again. Jesus dies for the sheep and he rises again for the sheep. God “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep” (Hebrews 13:20).

Does he have a demon?

John 10:19-21:

There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. ²⁰Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” ²¹Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, but others were listening in. To some, Jesus appeared to be deranged by demonic influence. How can he say, for example, that he has the authority to take up his life again after he’s dead? They suggest that no one should “listen to him.” Ah, but some are listening to him. The sheep hear his voice. Some are not put off by his words and take note of his works, most recently the healing of a blind man. Jesus said, in John 9:39, that he came into the world for “judgment”—that some, spiritually speaking, would have their eyes opened and that some would remain blind. The division he spoke of then is evident now.

A coldly indifferent world

Who are today’s thieves and robbers and hired hands? They’re everywhere, aren’t they? And there are so many of them! Jesus said that “all” who came before him were thieves and robbers.

Sad to say, sometimes they’re family members, mentors, and peers. They seem to care, like a shepherd should care, but they take advantage of us, some in ignorance, some with malice. At best, they don’t know our hearts. They value us, perhaps, for our wealth or appearance or intelligence or talents, but not really for who we are. At worst, they know our hearts only so that they might

manipulate us. They value us for what we can do for them and therefore scheme to profit from us.

In our area, we can be especially thankful for Real Options, gospel-centered pregnancy medical clinics, because, outside their doors, the false shepherds—well-intentioned, perhaps, but misinformed nonetheless—are heralding abortion as the best option in the event of unwanted pregnancies. In the United States, 14,000 newborns are given up for adoption annually, which might sound like a lot until the number of annual abortions is factored in: a whopping 1.3 million, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Less than 1 percent of women facing unplanned pregnancies in the United States make an adoption choice.

Then there's the culture at large—the one that we've created, by the way—which seemingly has your best interest at heart when it promises you the abundant life with the next purchase or distracts you from the things that matter with unrelenting busyness and connectivity. We are made to feel as if we are always missing out on something—not that we are missing out on Jesus, of course. Finally, there are the hired hands, people or institutions that stand by your side and promise to have your back but “turn and run farther when the fast bullets fly.”¹

These false shepherds deliver what Brent Curtis calls “The Message of the Arrows.” He writes of his own experience, telling of a mother who couldn't cope and of being pinned down on the playground by a larger “friend” and “feeling that I would always be in that place if I wasn't careful.”

There were other Arrows over the years that struck in that same deep place. Arrows that carried messages about ears that were too big, and a father who never called or wrote; my stepfather, who was a cowboy, commenting to my mother that I was a town kid; another stepfather who came and went and never stayed in touch. There was a girl I loved but couldn't love (intimacy requires a heart that is released and mine was pinned down with unknown fears and grief) and so I let her go; and a total confusion over what vocation I would pursue or even had an ability for. The Arrows flew and all seemed to strike close to that fearful place, that place that said that I was alone in a coldly indifferent world.²

What do the thieves and robbers do? They steal and kill and destroy. They, knowingly or not, steal and kill and destroy your heart. What's the result? Frederick Buechner

writes, “The original, shimmering self gets buried so deep that most of us end up hardly living out of it at all.”³

Jesus says that the thieves and the robbers and hired hands are “strangers,” but are they really? In some cases, they're the only voices we've known, so we're familiar with them. Only, perhaps, when we hear another voice are we able to recognize the voices of the thieves and robbers and hired hands as the voices of strangers. Then we know, just like the blind man knew, that we must not listen to them; we must listen to the voice of the good shepherd.

After calling out the false shepherds in Ezekiel 34:11, the Lord says, “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.” Listen to the voice of the good shepherd.

Is he the Christ?

John 10:22-30:

At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me,²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

The Feast of Dedication celebrated the liberation of the Jewish temple, which had been overtaken by pagans, in 167 B.C. under Judas Maccabaeus, a king-like figure. Is Jesus, walking in the temple precincts at this particular time, a new and better version of Judas Maccabaeus, poised to overthrow the pagans who now rule the Jews? Does he conceive of himself as the Christ, the ultimate Jewish king? The Pharisees want to know.

Yes, Jesus is the Christ, but no, he's not like Judas Maccabaeus. He's a different kind of king, coming to defeat a different kind of foe, Satan and his armies, who have deluded and oppressed pagans and Jews alike. Indeed, Jesus has told them that he is the Christ, albeit in metaphors:

e.g., “I am the good shepherd.” He will not speak plainly, because some would misunderstand him, classing him with the likes of Judas Maccabaeus, and others, like the Pharisees, would recognize that he is not like Judas Maccabaeus and seek to kill him.

Even if he won’t speak plainly, his works—the healing of a blind man and laying down his life for the sheep, for example—speak for themselves so that those who listen to him and watch him can understand that he is in fact the Christ, but a different king of Christ than the one they expected. Jesus goes beyond anyone’s conception of the Christ, especially inasmuch as no one expected the Christ to be God himself. The Pharisees, in their opposition to Jesus, have marked themselves as being outside the flock of the good shepherd.

What of those who are part of his flock? Earlier, Jesus said that he “came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Now, he further defines abundant life as “eternal life”—literally, “life of age,” life of the new and final and everlasting age, which is breaking into the world with his coming. Jesus shepherds his flock not only in this age but also in the age to come, so that each of his sheep enjoys his care eternally. Nothing and no one can break the bond between the shepherd and his sheep, not even death. How can this be? Because of Jesus’ unity with the Father, who is greater than everything and everyone, which makes Jesus greater than everything and everyone who would snatch the sheep from Jesus’ hand, which represents the Father’s hand. The sheep are under the protection of Jesus’ hand; they are also under the protection of the Father’s hand. They are as secure as they could possibly be. Is Jesus’ claim to be one with the Father a claim to deity? Again, Jesus won’t come right out and say it, but even his opponents understand him to be making such a claim.

Is he God?

John 10:31-39:

The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.
³²Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” ³³The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.” ³⁴Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods?’ ³⁵If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—³⁶do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world,

‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’ ³⁷If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” ³⁹Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.

Jesus’ opponents, once again, are poised to stone him, this time because they think he is making himself out to be God. Are they right? You’re darn straight! It’s an outrageous claim, really. But Jesus, once again, invites them to consider the evidence, to believe not solely based on what he says but also based on what he does, the works. Do the works validate the words? If the works validate the words, then, strictly speaking, Jesus is not making himself out to be God; he is, in fact, God—God incarnate, God in the flesh. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1, 14).

Jesus, facing a firing squad, throws up a complicated argument, based on Psalm 82:6, that sends their minds spinning, diverts them from their hostilities, and buys time for one more invitation to believe. The argument goes like this: in one place in the Scriptures, the word “gods” was used for humans who were, of course, less than God. If that’s the case, then shouldn’t the word “god” be used for a man who is, in actuality, God? Yes, but that’s not exactly what Jesus says. He says that he is “the Son of God.” So is he claiming to be God or not? Well, yes, but again, he’s not speaking plainly, lest his opponents unleash a fuselage of stones.

His words have their intended effect. First, he implores them, one more time, to believe based on his works, and second, he distracts them to the extent that they drop their stones and seek only to arrest him, not kill him—which buys him time to escape. The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father: no one can snatch the sheep from the Father’s hand or the Son’s hand, but Jesus is able to escape from the “hands” of those who would stone him. There will come a time, however, when Jesus, on purpose, will not escape from their hands—so that he might lay down his life for the sheep, so that they might never perish.

The voice of the good shepherd

In contrast to the thieves and robbers and hired hands, who steal and kill and destroy our hearts, Jesus, the good shepherd, knows our hearts. He looks beneath our wealth and our appearance and our intelligence and our talents.

It seems, at times, as if we are “alone in a coldly indifferent world”—that no one knows our hearts. Jesus, though, sees what no one else sees: he sees our hearts. He sees who we really are, even if we don’t know who we really are. Not only does he see our hearts, he also values our hearts.

Seeing us and valuing us, he protects us from that which would destroy us. Oh, the false shepherds may still abuse us and the wolves may still howl. Indeed, as the apostle Paul observes, quoting Psalm 44:22, “For your [God’s] sake we are being killed all the day long; / we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” Yes, but what else does he say? Because of Jesus, who shepherds us, “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” As the shepherd protects us, we actually benefit from that which would destroy us, as he turns defeat into victory. Nothing and no one, Paul says, neither false shepherds nor wolves, “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:36-39). Jesus, the good shepherd, lays down his life for us and rises again so that we might be safe, not simply for a few more years or decades but for all eternity: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

But we want more than protection, don’t we? We want not simply to survive but to thrive. Our hearts want to feel alive. We want what we might call “life,” and Jesus gives us more than what we want, more than life: he gives us abundant life, life overflowing. He doesn’t give us enough; he gives us more than enough. More than enough of what? Why, more than enough of his love, of course. The good shepherd leads us so that we “go in and out and find pasture,” feasting on his superabundant love, for he came that we “may have life and have it abundantly.” It is love that makes a heart feel alive. Indeed, the good shepherd leads us to good places, protecting our hearts and quickening our hearts.

Brent Curtis, whose heart was ravaged by false shepherds and hired hands, was “overcome with waves of shame” at the thought that he might be only the “second-best speaker” during a series of lectures. He considered redoubling his efforts to improve his upcoming lecture, but instead, he decided to go for a walk:

After not many minutes, I felt something begin to break up down inside, a feeling of loneliness and longing acknowledged. There was a release that brought tears. I sensed that Jesus was ministering to me in a quiet and tender way, in a place years distant and much deeper in my spirit than just feeling provoked by the events of that particular morning. A

sensation of freedom and well-being rose up from the very place inside that moments ago felt such agitation.

Bringing what was happening back up into my head in order to put words to it, I can only say it was as if Jesus were telling me, “I understand your ache, Brent. I know how you’ve wanted to be someone’s hero. It’s okay. Rest in my love.” There were no words of admonishment or exhortations to try harder. I understood, in some ways for the first time, that my sin really has been cleansed by Jesus and is no longer an issue between us. I knew in my heart, in a way I perhaps hadn’t before, the depth of Jesus’ love for me on the cross. I felt like I was home.⁴

That’s the voice of the good shepherd, who knows the heart of his wounded sheep and leads him to feast on his love. Note that Curtis says nothing about the quality of his lecture. Indeed, that which he first wanted, a better lecture, paled in comparison to what the good shepherd gave him: the green pastures of his love.

Jesus, having escaped arrest, makes a tactical retreat.

Can you hear the voice?

John 9:40-42:

He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. ⁴¹And many came to him. And they said, “John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” ⁴²And many believed in him there.

Jesus, for the moment, retreats, across the Jordan River, to the place where John the Baptist believed in him and faith in him flourished (John 1:19-51). There, away from his opponents, his sheep come to him. Despite Jesus’ words and works, the Pharisees refuse to believe in him. Across the Jordan, though, many believe the words of John, who had proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God. “The sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

Can you hear the voice of the good shepherd? Can you recognize it? It’s different from the voices of strangers—the false shepherds. He speaks with knowledge of your heart. He speaks to your heart. He speaks to the deepest places of your heart. Your shimmering self: it may be deeply buried, but it’s still shimmering. The voice of Jesus penetrates through all the layers of your heart, all the way down to your shimmering self. Listen. Can you hear him? Can you hear the voice of the good shepherd speaking to your heart?

Can you follow him as he leads you to feast on his love?

The actress and the Elephant Man

Joseph Merrick, the so-called Elephant Man, lived in the shadows, his heart unknown. However, toward the end of his life, some people became aware that he had a love for the theater. He was actually able to attend a performance on one occasion, concealed in a private box. Merrick was overwhelmed by the experience and relived it for weeks. An actress, Madge Kendal, became aware of Merrick and took an interest in his plight, though it is not thought that the two of them ever met.

However, in the 1980 film *The Elephant Man*, Kendal visits Merrick and gives him a gift: a copy of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Enthralled, Merrick opens the book and starts reading aloud—the part of Romeo, as it turns out. Kendal, who knows the play by heart, is struck by Merrick's sensitive reading and, seeing his heart, occupies the part of Juliet. They trade lines, across the room from one another, the Elephant Man and the beautiful actress, Romeo and Juliet. When it comes time in the script for Romeo and Juliet to kiss, Merrick blanches. The actress, though, walks across the room and tenderly kisses the Elephant Man on the cheek.

“Oh, Mr. Merrick,” she says, looking into his eyes. “You’re not an elephant man at all.”

“No?”

“No. You’re Romeo.”

With that, a tear forms in Merrick's eye and crawls down his cheek.⁵

Now can you hear the voice of the good shepherd speaking to your heart? You see, the beautiful actress is the good shepherd, and the Elephant Man is you. He kisses you—he lays down his life and takes it up again for you—and you're Romeo.

NOTES

¹Bob Dylan, “Masters of War.”

²Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 25.

³Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets* (HarperOne, 1991).

⁴Curtis and Eldredge, 173-74.

⁵*The Elephant Man* (Paramount Pictures, 1980).