

Fourth Sunday of Easter

NOT FOR SALE

John 10:11-18

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By Steven E. Albertin

11I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care 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. 16I have other sheep that do not belong to 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 in order to take it up again. 18No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

DIAGNOSIS: “Sold Out”

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Everyone For Sale*
The world has not changed since the time John wrote this to the church. It is still a dangerous place filled with “wolves” lurking around every corner seeking someone to devour. One look at the daily news reveals an endless litany of dangers. In response, there is an equally endless litany of “hired hands,”

salesmen, hawkers and pitchmen all offering their wares, everyone seeking to make a deal, promising us a better life in exchange for what we can pay. Everyone is for sale. The problem is that they claim to care for their customers but ultimately only care about their bottom line. Making a deal is all about their survival and not the survival of the “sheep.” When their costs get too high, their bottom line too weak and the snapping wolves too close, they “run away.” Cutting their losses, they move on to another flock where they can offer their services “for hire.”

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Everyone a Sucker*

Jesus warns his disciples to look out for “hired hands.” The problem is that “there is a sucker born every minute” (supposedly uttered by one of the most skilled “hired hands” of all time, P.T. Barnum)—fools like us who are all too willing to fall for the promises of the latest huckster. We listen to almost any voice who offers us a deal. We reveal ourselves to be every bit as self-interested as the hucksters. We delude ourselves into believing that the “hired hand” actually cares and can give us the security our hearts crave.

We live in a world filled with “hired hands” who pretend to be our shepherds when in fact they are our enemies. They will disappoint us. Even more, they will destroy us. Their promises are lies they cannot and will not keep.

Even worse, their promises burden us with endless conditions and obligations. “IF we would only do this, THEN we will get that.” IF we have these friends, IF we wear these clothes, IF we meet this sales goal, IF we have this house, IF we send our kids to these schools, IF we can have this job, THEN we will have it made, THEN we will be somebody, THEN we will be cool, THEN we will belong.

But we get suckered every time! We naively believe that IF we had this _____ (just fill in the blank with the latest “whatever”), THEN all would be well. But there is never enough. There is always another mountain to challenge us, another rival to displace us, and another problem to derail us. We never are indisputably cool and comfortably at peace. We are constantly restless and perpetually suspicious.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Everyone Sold Out*

It is a dangerous world out there. There is always someone “on the make” ready to take advantage of us and “sell us out.” Therefore, we withdraw into our sheepfolds. We build our walls. We are afraid to leave our ghettos where everyone is like us. In the grips of our self-protective cynicism, we trust no one, not even God. It is a lousy way to live. We think that we can survive. However, we have been “sold out” by the “hired hands” and by our own foolish arrogance. Finally, there is no escaping, not only the “wolves” but also God, who is fed up with our foolishness. In the end, we suffer the consequences. We get what we deserve. No one bypasses the cemetery.

PROGNOSIS: “Bought”

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Bought by the Shepherd*

BUT, there is the Good Shepherd who unlike any “hired hand” doesn’t need to make any deals. He has no bottom line to defend. He only cares about loving his sheep. So, he “buys” the sheep at the cost of his life, . . . on the cross. But just when the hired hands thought that they suckered another victim and the wolf thought he had his next lunch, God raises Jesus from the dead, delivering to his sheep what the hired hands could not, and chasing the wolves off into the night.

Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Counting on the Offer*

In a world of disappointment and fear, where every hired hand seems disingenuous, the Good Shepherd calls out our names, assuring us that we have nothing to fear. With no conditions to be met, or deals to be made, we are safe in his flock. We can count on him, who is not for sale, and who never stops promising: "You are mine . . . always . . . and forever."

Hearing that assuring voice and trusting its comforting promise, we live in a different world. Our lives change. Because the Good Shepherd is leading us, we are confident, secure, and at peace. We are free to come and go from the sheepfold unafraid.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Caring for the World*

No longer cynical nor despairing, we are freed from our love of self . . . to love the world. We seek to do our best while others are only for hire. We care for others while some only seem to ask, "What's in it for me?" We even take an old friend out to lunch and pick up the bill.

In a world of hired hands that are always on the make, where it seemed that love was impossible, where we have always got to carefully garner our resources lest we run out, we have nothing to lose. We get to give ourselves away, confident there will always be enough. Such is the "abundant life" that the Good Shepherd gives to those he has bought and to those for whom no price was too great to pay.