

# Fourth Sunday of Easter

## THE BEAUTIFUL SHEPHERD

John 10:11-18

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Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

John 10:11 [Jesus said,] "I 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."

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## DIAGNOSIS: Hired Hands

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *In Need of Leadership*

This text is an extended commentary on the parable or parables found in 10:1-10. The parables reflect kernels of parables or similes that Jesus had spoken, probably against all of the religious leadership (a reason for them to want to kill him),

then later interpreted by John in support of the Gentile mission. But the basic pastoral metaphor of sheep needing a shepherd is presupposed throughout, with strong OT applications to people in need of good leadership (esp. Ezek. 34). The basic fact of human existence is laid bare: we are all in need of leadership, even leaders. And leadership—here, human leadership, whether good or bad—the scriptures assure us, is from God. Needing leadership is a good thing made beautiful by our Creator. But it is corrupted and made ugly by the mutually parasitic relationship between sinful people and sinful leaders. No one escapes the corruption, not even the best among us, especially those who assume leadership in the Church.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Following Hired Hands***

Leadership always becomes a problem because it is based on trust-or fear, which is simply trust turned inside out. All leaders, willing or not, but especially those claiming leadership from God, are swept up in the inevitable corruption of leadership itself, that is, with the misappropriation of trust. The sheep are not blameless, however, because they too misappropriate the trust that they must put in their leaders. All leaders are therefore “hired hands” (vv. 12-13), misappropriating the similarly misappropriated trust placed in them by their sheep. As the ugly history of Israel’s God-appointed kings demonstrates, sin affords no one an escape from leadership’s corrupting power, because leadership-trust (i.e., leadership-faith) is in God alone. In the language of our text, true leadership is based on faith in-God’s appointed One, that is, “hearing” the voice and “knowing” the “good shepherd” (vv. 14, 16).

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Scattered and Destroyed***

Placing our trust in hired hands instead of the God who created

leadership inevitably results in the hired hands “running away” and the sheep “scattering” (v. 13). As John put it, “The thief (or hired hand) comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (10:10). The inevitable failure of leadership is a deadly failure because it always fails to lead to God!-to paraphrase Melanchthon’s famous dictum, “The Law always accuses” (Apology IV, Augsburg Confession; see Romans 3:20, 4:15). Though God himself created leadership for our benefit (the civil use of the law), our failure to faithfully lead and be led (the theological use of the law) is proved in the failure of leadership to lead us to God, that is, to “salvation” or “pasture” (10:9). Such is the “curse” we are all under (see Galatians 3:10f)

## **PROGNOSIS: The Beautiful Shepherd**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Beautiful Shepherd***

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd” (v. 11). A better translation here for the Greek word “kalos” is “beautiful,” as in “What a beautiful game!” referring to some sport. This translation is more of a Hebraic use of the word than a Greek one. “Good” is just too moralistic for the context. Using the shepherd and sheep metaphor, the sense is that Jesus, in “laying down his life in order to take it up again” (v. 18) is a “beautiful shepherd” (or, if one must, the “perfect model”) for leadership, in reference both to his Father (being led, v. 17) and to us (leading, v. 11). Jesus’ dying and rising as a singular event is, at the “command” (v. 18) or will of his Father, on behalf of the sheep. Jesus is “beautiful” in that our salvation is accomplished in his dying and rising “for the sheep” (v. 11). Jesus is the beautiful shepherd precisely in that he is our beautiful Savior!

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trusting in Jesus’ Beautiful Leadership***

It is impossible to understand by our powers of reason how it is that Jesus' leadership is salvific-maybe because that salvation is delivered, not in terms of worldly success, but in terms of dying to worldly success and rising to faith in God our Father. It takes the dying to "see" (or believe, as in John 9:41) the rising! Faith, then, is the presupposition for all authentic leadership. It's a variation on the idea that the First Commandment is the presupposition for all the other commandments. In other words, apart from faith in God everything we do or think is sin. But what makes faith in Jesus' leadership saving is how and where he leads-that "he leads us in paths of righteousness" (Ps. 23:3). Jesus brings us, along with him, into a beautiful relationship with the Father.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Following the Leader, Beautifully*

The faithful leadership that Jesus describes in John 13-15 and 21 has near parallels throughout the NT (see esp. Mark 9:33f and 10:42f, namely, "whoever would be great among you must be your servant"), but in John faithful leadership is spoken in terms of love, namely, "This is my will, that you love one another as I have loved you" (15:12). John's nuance, "No longer do I call you servants . . . but I have called you friends" (15:15) signals that faithful leadership is paired with faithful following. Now that is "beautiful"! Jesus-like leadership is based on faithful following rather than trust in success; it's based on seeing all things through the eyes of faith-which is "love." No one in the Church is a "hired hand" but rather a "servant of all" (Luther). Beautiful leadership is not in being perfect or in making perfect decisions, or even relatively good ones, but rather forsaking our misplaced trust in the world, trusting instead that our Jesus-like faith makes all things new, now! Beautiful leadership, like beautifully following our Lord, dies daily to worldly power and worldly honor and worldly expectations, and in

such dying rises ever anew in faithful relationship with God and his creation.