

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Knowing and Following the Voice of the Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18

Fourth Sunday of Easter analysis by Steven Kuhl

1'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' 6Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. 7So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. 9I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go 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.'

DIAGNOSIS: Deserted, Snatched by Wolves

Step 1-Initial Diagnosis : *Scattered, divided*

This text is written to the Christian community in which John

lived; and as John sees it, that community was in trouble. It was not the community of love it was called to be (15:1-17). Rather, the people are scattered and distant from one another. They are not dedicated to one another with heart and soul, mind and strength. Instead, they were dedicated to self-preservation through self-improvement, thinking that this was the ethos of God's fold. When the going got tough they deserted one another like the "hired hand" in our text (10:12). What resulted was the demise of community: a people more interested in making comparisons than giving acceptance, a people more dedicated to competition and self-preservation through self-improvement than to mutual care (13:12-17).

Step 2-Advanced Diagnosis : *Tuned in to the wrong "voice"*

According to John's Jesus, the ethos just described is a reflection of the "voice" to which the people are listening. They have tuned out the voice of the Good Shepherd and have tuned in upon the voice of another: the voice that speaks the law as though it was a way of salvation. To be sure, Moses never spoke of it that way, but nevertheless, there are those who do. To be "tuned in" on the voice of law in this way, means to be captivated by the voice, to take it to heart, to believe in it religiously, savingly, as a means of self preservation. Note how religious, pious, godly, and biblical this "other voice" is. For the people of Jesus' time that voice had the religious authority of the synagogue behind it (9:28). For John's time, it seems to have been more complicated. The Church already had an existence – and leaders – separate from the synagogue. However, some of those leaders seemed to have deserted the gospel. When confronted by the popular, cultural alternative to the Good Shepherd, they got scared for their lives and preached another gospel as a way of salvation instead. To Jesus these leaders were like "thieves" (Jn 1:10) robbing the flock of the voice of the Good Shepherd; they are like "hirelings" taking what they

perceived as the safe, culturally acceptable route caring nothing for the sheep. Right smack dab in the midst of the church there was a confusion of voices about the way of salvation: law verses gospel. And the church was being brought to the moment of crisis: which voice would be believed, which leader would be followed? Many seem to be opting against the Good Shepherd.

Step 3-Final Diagnosis : *Snatched by Wolves*

As Jesus warns, to follow any other voice but his is like being left to our own devices in a dangerous wolf-world. Those leaders preaching law as salvation will be of no help to you when the day of judgment comes. They will be long gone and you will be left to the wolves, to certain death. They are found wanting by the very standards of the old motto, “there is no salvation outside the Church.” And by “Church” we do not mean some religious institutional entity, but the actual “flock of God,” gathered to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

PROGNOSIS: Shepherded, Gathered to Christ

Step 4-Initial Prognosis : *Good Shepherding*

The solution to all this is found in the fact that in the person of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd came among his scattered sheep, once and for all, to gather them. What characterizes his shepherding as “good” is that he is not intimidated by legalistic challengers – even to their charges of “blasphemy” and threats of “stoning” (10:31-33) – but is willing (10:18) to lay down his life for his sheep (10:11, 15, 17, 18). The cross, which his opponents thought would be the instrument of his silencing, was actually his megaphone. It is the means through which his own come to know him loud and clear as their shepherd – and come to know him as love. What’s more, in his resurrection they know him as the One who is “loved by the Father” (10:17) and that his act of “laying down his life for the sheep” was not

merely his idea but the will of the Father. With the Father's backing he has real authority – real power! – to lay down and take up his life (10:18) and to give it in great abundance to his sheep (10:10).

Step 5-Advanced Prognosis : *Knowing and Following the Shepherd's Voice*

The identifying marks of the Good Shepherd (his cross and resurrection) are so unique and captivating that any true sheep simply cannot mistake him for another (10:14). Like love itself, the sheep know him when they hear him. But what's more, to know him is to follow him (10:27). That captivating is this Shepherd, that enlivening is the abundant life he gives – already! In a world in which everyone looks out for themselves, seeks self-preservation through works of law, Christians have a different instinct ingrained in them: Jesus calls it faith. The sheep know their shepherd to be the master-servant (13:12-20), and knowing that, have internalized the value of servanthood for themselves. Following is not an act of blind, dumb obedience. Good followers are knowledgeable. They know exactly what they are following and why. That's what makes them so good at following. This does not mean that there are not "leaders" in the Church. There are. But such leaders are sub-shepherds, master-followers, appointed by the Shepherd to serve on his behalf (21:15-19). Church leaders lead by following Christ and calling others to do the same. Church leaders are the "voice of the Good Shepherd" in the midst of the flock and are known by the same identifying marks by which the Christ is known: their willingness to lay down their life for his sheep, their unreserved proclamation of the way of the cross as the way to abundant living (21:19), even as hirelings oppose them with their legalistic alternatives.

Step 6-Final Prognosis : *Gathered as a Community of Care One for Another*

Fortified by faith in Christ and captivated by the values of

following and servanthood, those who know the voice of the Good Shepherd naturally find themselves a part of a new community, the sheepfold of the Shepherd, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Following Jesus can never be a private affair; it is always an affair of the fold. The churching of the sheep, the gathering of the fold as a community of care, is all part of the abundant life he gives. In the midst of the fold we receive his feeding, his protection, his care and his life. In the fold, there is no competition, but only mutual care and "friendship" (15:13). In the fold, the command and desire of Christ (that we "love one another as he has loved us") becomes a reality.