

“And When He Found Him”
 Sermon for 11 October 2015
 Text: John 10:1-6

Last we visited John 9, we concluded the controversy which swept up a man born-blind and ended with his being **thrown out**, that is disfellowshipped from the local synagogue. It is ironic that the Pharisees end where the disciples began. The disciples asked, **who sinned this man or his parents that this man was born blind.** (v. 2) Jesus replies **Neither this man nor his parents sinned** that he would be born blind. And, besides, that is not the important matter. What matters is that he is here at all. Then Jesus asserts a wonderful thing: **this happened that the works of God might be displayed in him.** (v. 3) The Pharisees expel the man with cursing: **You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!** (v. 34) Jesus lifts the curse of sin, *introduces hope*; but our fellow sinners have a willingness to keep us in bondage to our history, our disability, even our victim status! There is an application here for us in shepherding: lift the curse of sin, try not to reinforce it. As it is written: **The bruised reed, He will not break; the smoking wick, He will not snuff out.** (Isaiah 42:3 // Matt. 12:20)

Something that we might turn away from with pitiable avoidance, sightlessness, Jesus brings into redemptive focus. ***This man's disability is a opportunity for God to display His power in an through him.*** And there is more—but it will have to wait a moment. We are prone, upon hearing this hope, to get all exultant: “Oh, God is going to move. This man may be healed! Wouldn't that be wonderful.” *But the works of God are actually disruptive . . . some very disturbing things are included in the package of healing.* The man's private life is shellacked, his relationships must all be re-worked. Not only will the lame throw away his crutches, some crutches will be snatched away. Excuses for dependency, for irresponsibility are gone—healed feet are for walking on, restored sight is for seeing. And, all the while, other people with very warped understandings, and even some vicious agendas, will work us over—attack, isolate, harass us—as if they mean to keep us down, disabled and discounted. If he had know what all the publicity would bring, he might have preferred not to be a demonstration of the **works of God**. However, he is not alone in that reaction—many of those God has healed struggle both with their new health and other's reactions to the change.

Still, when God gets hold of His lamb and wrests him out of a pit of addiction, or begins to deal with an imbedded pattern of abuse, or of severe guilt, shame, or anger, or trauma, **the works of God** are displayed but life seems to be complicated in the process. Sudden deliverance is perhaps even more difficult to adjust to! Old friends may have to be exchanged for better, or, shall we say, real friends. As the company we keep changes, we are

changed further. The adjustments may put blisters on your feet, or scars on your heart.

We could even say, with hindsight, it's a good thing this man was naive. Grace comes over the unsuspecting and the old man gets done in . . . slain, buried, discarded. The healed person hardly knows what to do with himself! *Hardly knows himself!* It is spiritually awkward. If you happened to be born blind, and now you see, there may be, probably will be things you'd rather not see. What the blind man doesn't know is that he is "a lost sheep of Israel." He also doesn't know that the shepherd has arrived and he is about to be inflocked—I mean, added to the flock of God. He cannot remain with his former flock. That, too, entails some pain of breaking in, of adjustment. Here's a second application: We know that our true identity is in Christ. However, in the living of life, we are prone to deviate from that truth and to define ourselves in more worldly terms: by our history, our legacy of loss and betrayal—in short our life circumstances. Case in point, this man is God's own sheep in the garb of a blind beggar. His brokenness was overt, public, open to all who gave him alms. Some, who gave him money, may have done so out of mercy and others for wretched purposes (relief, secret pride, hoping to feel better about themselves). So, remember, outward appearances are just that—true identity lies deeper, safer than that.

Either way, pain is where we must start. The pain of rejection, of shaming. Everyone thought that someone had been incredibly bad for the outcome, for this man being born blind, to occur. Thoughts like that marginalize people, cause you to feel prejudged, or discriminated against. *Being born blind was part of this man's recovery as God's sheep!* Reduced to begging? Asking and asking every day for someone to be kind, part with some spare change, to bankroll your desperation—feeling vestigial, useless, expendable in other's heartless eyes. Now we are, obviously, moving into territory not restricted solely to the blind. In our highly individualistic, success driven, competence-based culture, there are many down and outers, many apparent failures. The weight of loneliness can be an intolerable thing . . . therefore people resort to all kinds of activities just to feel real, noticed and connected, happy and pain free. Furthermore, there is this herding instinct in us, a strong desire to belong to group. It is as if we know that we are partly like sheep and we are longing to find our shepherd—or, perhaps better said, longing be found by Him as was this man born-blind. That same hunger is derived from our heart's longing for God and is parodied by our quest for a romantic lead in our lives. Redirecting that desire, from someone to God, is one of the finest things a shepherd can do for his sheep. Sheep get distracted and often deceived.

Okay, and now for the other astounding piece of Jesus' response to the question, **Who sinned?** I apologize for keeping you waiting so long! Jesus adds, **As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent Me¹.** Yes, we get that *Jesus came on a mission* (to find, rescue, or recover the lost sheep of Israel); but then there is this “we” business! Jesus wraps us into the deal, we, you and I, we are bound into this mission . . . we are to do the **works of God**. I won't mince words: we are to shepherd as Jesus shepherds. ***We are on His mission—our lives are a mission extension service!*** We are to do the works of God (heal, free, deliver and raise to life—shepherd and tend His sheep) and we are to be full time, fully committed shepherds. We are going to deal with the messes, the smells, the diseases, the cleaning and grooming needs of sheep. I know how beautiful sheep can appear dotting the distant green hills, or leaping the wall on our way to sleep—but we are going to wear their lanolin, and smell of them before we get done! Shepherding is, sometimes, on a par with changing dirty diapers . . . or cleaning up pet mess indoors. Unpleasantness is part of the deal.

And, as you know, we are just as much harassed and helpless as any sheep that Jesus had compassion on. But the real life issue is this: the unpleasantness isn't going away. The care of sheep is relentless—we may get a brief respite from time to time, but the persistent neediness is just a piece of the program, comes with the territory. Yes, along with lions, wolves and the occasional bear! You may think you “own” the sheep, but there are times when all that seems reversed *and periodic exhaustion tells you that you are owned, lock, stock and barrel by those you've been trained to shepherd.*

We all like sheep have gone astray, scripture says, in another place. Sheep wander, and stumble and blunder—toppled off cliffs and tumble into rushing waters. We/they get frightened, we know our desire for a shepherd because we cannot manage life on our own. We are in the midst of a disaster (life!) that we fervently hope will *somehow*, miraculously perhaps *and against all expectation*, turn out right. Some of us feel like a driver lost, without direction, who keeps moving in hopes of getting to our destination! We are hanging on, just hoping that **He** shows up . . . before it's all over for us. We exhaust ourselves beating off the bad, we take up arms against overwhelming evil . . . and then cry out, repeatedly, “Lord, come save us. Watch over us and make us good. Tells us what to do and give us the power to do it.”

¹ Keeping one's sheep by night—as certain shepherds did in the fields on the night that our Savior was born—is a largely protective function. Sheep are shepherded during the day. They rest by night but need oversight. This rhythm is crucial to health and wholeness. There is no time off. If the shepherd is away, someone must be appointed to stand his watch!

An essential part of finding our way home, into the flock of God, depends not only on finding the Good Shepherd but on finding a credible under-shepherd for our local church/flock. We can only hope to find one of them if we know his biblical credentials. John 10:1-6 suggests:

1. There is the shepherd's manner of entry. Is it straightforward? Is it honest? There's a right way and a wrong way to enter into a shepherding role—or a leadership role, in public service or business. Today the sheep may follow their pastor confidently when they see that he is following Christ! **For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they might be saved. Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.** (1 Cor. 10:33-11:1) What is painfully obvious is that false shepherds, mere hirelings at best (and thieves and robbers at worst), are simply not into shepherding all that much. *They are into other stuff.* A lack of transparency is a good indication that something's awry.

2. The second criterion has to do with recognition. All true believers, according to 1John 2:7 (**But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.**), have the spirit-given ability to discern between truth and damning error; or they are no true sheep. A stranger they will not follow . . . they will run away. It is tempting to think that this might be a fourth credential. However, what we have here, I think, is the complement of the previous credential. They do not follow because they are busy running away.

3. Does he genuinely care for the sheep? **Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, He said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in Him.” Jesus said, “You have now seen Him; in fact he is the one who you are speaking with.”** Does he introduce the sheep to their Master?

So we have been reminded we are to lift the curse (speak hope), support those in spiritual rehabilitation, befriend the new lambs, and keep our identity in Christ foremost in mind. It helps to be honest about the complexity and the attendant pain: *change is painful and complicated.* But our mission in life is an extension of His mission: locate sheep, call sheep home and feed the sheep until He comes. And all the while remember, humbly, we are they!

Amen.