

Easter 4B

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me”
John 10:14

The last two days I attended a Leadership Seminar called Maximum Impact. There were pastors and business leaders from Janesville seeking better ways to lead their people from a simulcast attended by over 80 thousand people.

One of the blessings for me from this seminar was hearing Ted Haggard, a pastor from Colorado Springs challenging pastors to give people value for their money, time and talent. The buzz word he said for our day was efficiency. Be effective in your ministry or people will invest their time, talent and treasure elsewhere. Give people you want to serve value for their investment.

The second idea he gave went along with being efficient so that people we serve would have value for their investment. That idea was this: “Live your life as if there were no secrets.” This second idea he said has changed the business community. When pastors have an attitude that is not defensive, not fearful but are joyfully living as if there were no secrets they and their churches will project an innocence to their community where people want to invest.

Like it or not those ideas are being espoused by churches today because they are understood by a world that is looking not only for values but for value added ministry. People want to know that their investment will make a difference in their lives and the lives of those in their community and the world. People want value for a dollar but they also want to know whether the church has such value for human life, that its members live out trust and love for one another and their world. Ted Haggard said if the church is to reach the business community it needs to make itself a better organization that makes life better for all people.

That includes making life better for the sheep. And those sheep include both those inside the church and the homeless and the drunk and the immigrant who are outside it. Making lives better means that we take care of the natural needs and the spiritual needs. Without both parts we cease being the church. The business community looks to us to do both.

Are these ideas new? Where did they originate? The Bible of course. And we have as our model the good shepherd. And Jesus tells we pastors what a good shepherd does.

The good shepherd lays his life down for the sheep. This attribute of the good shepherd is highlighted and repeated. Compared to a gate, the good shepherd protects the sheep by both keeping hungry predators out of the fold and keeping defenseless sheep inside.

Secondly, Jesus makes it clear that the good shepherd gathers the scattered sheep and purges the flock of those who do not belong to him. In the language of good shepherding the account in Ezekiel 34 recalls the results of bad shepherds that fattened themselves, take the wool for clothing, and fail to care for the sheep. As the result of poor leadership the sheep are scattered. To take such a stand against the bad shepherds will be a dangerous mission for the good shepherd and Jesus foretells that mission in his life. In Ezekiel the first job that God as Good Shepherd has is to rescue the sheep from the false shepherds.

Thirdly, Jesus mentions the hired hand who does not own the sheep, and makes them vulnerable. Because of this lack of ownership the hired hand allows the enemy, the wolf to come in and snatch away the sheep. During the time of this message the Jews were celebrating the Feast of the Dedication or Hanukkah. It commemorates the rededication of the ancient temple by Judas Maccabeus after it was desecrated by King Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B.C. The priests, Jason and Menelaus, who allowed such desecration to occur, may have been the ones Jesus had in mind when he spoke of the robbers or hirelings who care nothing for the sheep. Priest who bought their way into office and stood by to see the house of God profaned and defiled were not good shepherds. Furthermore, Jesus points out later in John 10:22-30, that people who would support such priests are not the sheep of the good shepherd.

Lastly, the good shepherd looks outside the fold to “other sheep” not of this fold. The “other sheep” will be the Gentiles who will come into the fold because the shepherd lays his life down. Jesus loves his sheep. He has been given this charge by God to show the world that by laying down his life for the people, life will be added to them.

Erin Brockovich raised the city of Hinckley, CA, to its feet, and brought a large company to its knees. It is the story of a twice-divorced mother of three young children who sees an injustice, takes on the bad guy and wins.

With no money, no job and no prospects on the horizon, Erin Brockovich is a woman in a tight spot. Following a car accident in which Erin is not at fault, she finds herself even worse off when her attorney fails to land her any kind of settlement. With nowhere else to turn, Erin pleads with her attorney Ed Masry to hire her at his law firm. It is there, while working, that Erin stumbles upon some medical records placed in real estate files. Confused, she begins to question the connection. She convinces Ed to allow her to investigate, where she discovers a cover-up involving contaminated water in a local community which is causing devastating illnesses among its residents.

Although the local citizens are initially leery of becoming involved, Erin's persistence and the personal interest she takes in their lives makes them listen. A kindred spirit, Erin is one of them, and her ability to connect with them on their level makes them comfortable, ultimately earning their trust. Helping her out is her next door neighbor George, a Harley Davidson biker whose friendship and support allows her the time to pursue the case. Going door to door, she signs up over 600 plaintiffs, and Erin and Ed, with the help of a major law firm, go on to receive the largest settlement ever paid in a direct-action lawsuit in U.S. history...\$333 million.

Brockovich is a modern story of a good shepherd who led the people of Hinckley to justice. Her story was a triumph for good shepherding. One person with loving support can make a difference. Today, Erin B. continues to care for those without a voice in Brooklyn, NY. There she will help eleven residents of Greenpoint who have had their water contaminated make their stand against Exxon-Mobil, Chevron and BP oil companies.

Jesus laid his life down for the sheep. We can only conclude that those were some valuable sheep.

Today, as your shepherd and leader, we can make a difference in the life of people who are looking for something of value. We have an opportunity today and tomorrow to dream of value added ministries that can make a difference to the lives around us. May we be found worthy of their investment and of their precious life for which God gave his son Jesus. AMEN!