

Sermon: No Other Name

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St Giles Presbyterian Church, Ottawa, on April 25, 2021)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts
be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Jobsworth, a British idiom that is derived from the phrase “I can’t do that, it’s more than my job’s worth’. The term describes a person who won’t lift a finger to do more than the bare minimum of their job requirement. When asked to do something slightly strenuous, they immediately point to their job description, fuming indignantly, “It’s not there in my contract!”.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Jobsworth as “A person in authority (especially a minor official) who insists on adhering to rules and regulations or bureaucratic procedures even at the expense of common sense.”

This is what the English songwriter and folk-singer Jeremy Taylor wrote (and sang) about Jobsworth:

Jobsworth, Jobsworth, Its more than me job’s worth
I don’t care, rain or snow
whatever you want the answer’s no,
I can keep you waiting for hours in the queue,
and if you don’t like it you know what you can do.

A jobsworth frustrates colleagues and clients equally, and casts a cloud of passivity and apathy over the workplace. But in defence of jobsworth, who among us could dare say that “I have yet to reach a limit where this job is no longer worth it”. Who among us could honestly say that “I always give it all, 110% at all time”. Who among us has ever been asked to lay down one’s life for a job, and is actually willing to do it?

I supposed if you are working in the presidential protection detail of the Secret Service of the United States, and had actually taken a bullet for a sitting president, I’ll give you that. But for the rest of us, whether you are front line health care workers, or teachers in classrooms without adequate ventilation, or those working safely from home but now suffering from prolong Zoom fatigue and corresponding headache, might I suggest that there is a jobsworth in all of us. it is just a matter of degree.

Jesus doesn't use the term jobsworth, but uses a similar term — hired hand, in the Gospel of John, chapter 10:12-13, "*The 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. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.*"

In the context of the community of faith, shepherds are those whom anointed and appointed by God to lead the people of God. They are to rule with justice, to care with compassion, and to practice *hesed* — a combination of lovingkindness to the people and covenantal loyalty to their God.

Moses and David were the prototypical shepherds in the Old Testament. They were actual shepherds of sheep who became rulers of God's people. They exemplified what good shepherds could be, ought to be. However, the history of Israel was littered with bad ones.

Prophet Jeremiah (in chapter 23) lamented about shepherds who destroy and scatter the flock of God's pasture, and promised that God will personally gather the scattered. Prophet Ezekiel (in chapter 34) spoke against shepherds who have been fattening themselves, at the expense the flock. In response, God will personally shepherd the flock. God will look for them, will save them, will gather them, and will feed them.

In such a context, when Jesus boldly proclaimed in John 10:11, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*", he assumes the divine role that no one else dare, and no one else could. The basis of this bold proclamation is because of 'knowing' — "*I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.*"

As the flock, we are known by Jesus, and by extension, we are also known by God the Father. We are shepherd by the Son, for Christ is willing to lay down his life for us, and he did so willingly on the cross. In such obedience to the Father, God raised Jesus from the dead and bestowed onto him all honour, glory and praise. Alleluia, praise be to the Triune God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What then of the hired hand? In all honesty, I know that is precisely what I am. A leader of the community of faith here at St Giles, a shepherd of the flock that is not my own. In saying this, I am also including elders of the session of St Giles, and together we are entrusted by the One and True Good Shepherd, to pastor to the people of God in this context, at this time.

Are we not hired hands? I ask this rhetorically because I know that is precisely what we are, hired hands. Don't we also have a limit beyond which it is no longer jobsworth, no longer worth the job?

The Good News of the Gospel is this: even hired hands are part of the flock, needing to be shepherded by Christ himself.

We see this in the disciples of Jesus, those who had followed Jesus for three years, witnessed numerous miracles performed by their master, thoroughly taught by their Teacher in words and deeds, commissioned and sent out by the Lord, broke bread with him countless times. Yet when testing came, when Jesus was arrested, tried and crucified, the disciples of Jesus ran away all the same.

Nevertheless, the resurrection of Christ changed all that. The resurrection appearances of Jesus, to Mary, to Peter, John, to Thomas, and to a whole host of many others, was Christ's way of shepherding his flock.

No longer a cowardly bunch, hiding in a corner, afraid of wolves. The hired hands were being gathered, fed, healed, reconciled and transformed. The lectionary passage we read earlier in Acts 4:5-12 revealed to us of that transformation, particularly in Peter and John.

They were brought before the Sanhedrin, the assembly of rulers, elders, scribes and high-priestly family of Annas, Caiaphas, John and Alexander. The very same power and principality that had already engineered the death of Jesus.

Peter and John were asked, *"By what power or by what name did you do this?"*, referring to the healing of a beggar who had been crippled for more than forty years. With no fear of death or other more frightful punishments, the disciples of Jesus replied (in verse 10 to 12), *"...by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."*

There is no other name but the name of Jesus. Full stop!

The hired hands of Christ, now following the example of their Lord, willingly laying down their lives, just so the name of Jesus would be proclaimed, at that time, in all time.

As we reflect on these passages, and on our roles in this story, we should be mindful that this Sunday is designated by the Presbyterian Church in Canada as 'Mission Awareness Sunday'. As we rejoice in the Lord as our shepherd, who makes us lie down in green pastures; who leads us beside still waters; who restores our souls. We ought not neglect the words of Jesus, "*I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.*" In its original context, it most likely referred to the Gentiles who were not part of the Jewish people, not part of the covenantal community of faith. Yet, it is not be limited to such.

The word 'mission' comes out of the Latin word '*missio*', that is to send away, to discharge or to dismiss. However in our understanding of *Missio Dei*, the mission of God, we as the Church is being sent forth to accomplish the will of God. It is not our mission, not what we design to do. It starts with us, praying and discerning what God cares and what God wills.

Knowing that the Good Shepherd has other sheep that do not belong to this fold, compels us outward to care for those who have yet to experience the care of God. Knowing that the Good Shepherd has other sheep not in the fold, compels us outward, to share what we have found in Christ. Just like the lame and crippled beggar, who was fed and healed, we have found the bread of life, we have found the living water, and we can't wait to share those with our neighbours. Knowing that the Good Shepherd has other sheep, that do not belong to this fold, compels us outward, to proclaim boldly in a world that embraces the doctrine of 'all roads lead to Rome'. Yet, if one's destination is not Rome, but the Kingdom of God then there is no other way, there is no other name.

The challenge for us remains the same, as hired hands or the flock. Whenever we become fond of our community, of our own fold, Jesus reminds us that he's equally committed to those outside it, saying "*I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*"

**To the glory of God the Shepherd, Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**