

The Good Shepherd



John 10:1-21
Year A Easter 4 ; Year B
Easter 4

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ▲ | Pharisee #1 - a leader of the Pharisees investigating Jesus who's already decided that Jesus is a dangerous heretic and rebel | ▲ | | ▲ | | ▲ | | ▲ |
| ▲ | Pharisee #4 - a Pharisee who listens to Jesus' sermon but doesn't understand it | ▲ | | ▲ | | ▲ | | ● |
| ▲ | Pharisee #5 - another Pharisee who hears Jesus and understands a lot of what he hears | ▲ | | ● | | ▲ | | ▲ |
| ▲ | Pharisee #2 - another leader of the Pharisees more friendly to Jesus | ▲ | | ▲ | | ▲ | | ▲ |
| ▲ | Pharisee #3 - a cynical leader who's skeptical about both sides of the argument | ▲ | | ● | | ● | | ■ |
| ▲ | Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus | | ▲ | | ▲ | | ● | |
| ▲ | James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group) | | ▲ | | ▲ | | ● | |
| ▲ | Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room | | ▲ | | ▲ | | ● | |
| ▲ | Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor | | ▲ | | ▲ | | ▲ | |
| ▲ | Jesus | | ▲ | | ● | | ■ | |

Scene 1

Pharisee #1 , Pharisee #2 , Pharisee #3 , Pharisee #4 , Pharisee #5

Pharisee #1 Did you see him then?

Pharisee #4 Yes, sir. We spent the whole afternoon in the crowd.

- Pharisee #5** Filthy rabble!
- Pharisee #2** *[gently correcting]* Unwashed or not, they're our flock, and we should speak more kindly of them.
- Pharisee #1** Not if they're following this shyster.
- Pharisee #3** Decided about him already, have we?
- Pharisee #2** Of course not. The whole purpose of this investigation is to gather evidence so we can decide if this man is a threat to the community.
- Pharisee #4** He seemed pretty harmless to me.
- Pharisee #5** He most certainly did not! Did you even hear some of the things he said?
- Pharisee #4** I heard everything just fine. For example, he spoke of the people as a flock, just like we do.
- Pharisee #1** Sure, because he'd like to fleece them!
- Pharisee #3** *[sarcastically]* Hands off our fleece! I mean: our sheep!
- Pharisee #2** *[earnestly]* We do our best to serve the people. If we decide against this man, it must be because we determine he means to harm them. It can't be because we're threatened by another spiritual leader who seeks to serve them as well.
- Pharisee #3** Really? What if he drew away enough people that we had to cut back on staff and you got the boot?
- Pharisee #5** He did draw a huge crowd today. And they hung on his every word like I've never seen before.
- Pharisee #4** How was that a bad thing? I have to admit, I found his sermon very...engaging as well.
- Pharisee #1** *[threateningly]* Maybe you'd like to be relieved of your duties so you can be free to become his disciple.

Pharisee #4 No! I didn't mean...I mean...

Pharisee #1 Stop sputtering and make your report! Tell us exactly what this "teacher" said today.

Scene 2

James , Jesus , Joanna , Judas , Peter

{The disciples discuss the sermon with Jesus.}

Joanna That went very well.

James *[to Jesus]* Great sermon, rabbi.

Peter *[to Jesus]* Yeah, even I understood what you were saying!

Judas Did you?

Peter *[suddenly less certain]* Well, uh, I think so.

Judas Explain it for us, then. I'm not sure *I* understand it completely.

Peter Uh, rabbi?

Jesus I'm always interested in what people make of my sermons. Please, Peter, go ahead. And don't worry: there are no wrong answers.

Peter Okay, well: There was a shepherd and his sheep, and I guess you're the shepherd and we're the sheep. You guide us and take care of us and like that. Right?

James No way! We're not the sheep. We're more like the shepherd, aren't we?

Joanna But the rabbi is the shepherd. The good shepherd, as he put it.

James But he also said he was the gate of the sheep pen. *[to Jesus]* You did say that, too, didn't you? *[to all]* As I see it, we're the shepherds, and he's the one who gives us the power to minister to the sheep, by letting us into the pen or keeping us out.

Peter He can't be the shepherd and the gate at the same time, can he? *[to Jesus]* Can you?

Jesus *[with good humor]* I suppose I can be whatever I want in my own sermon!

Joanna A shepherd *is* the gate of the fold, in a way. He controls the gate anyway, if it's a constructed one, and if the pen is just a cave, then maybe he really is the gate physically.

Jesus *[laughing]* That could work. *[to Judas]* But was that what confused you about the sermon? Do you understand it any better now?

Judas No, what I really wondered was who the thieves and robbers were.

Peter The thieves and robbers?

Joanna Ah yes. The thieves and robbers kept out by the gate of the pen. Or by the shepherd.

James Maybe the thieves and robbers are exactly that: thieves and robbers. Or murderers, or other criminals. Those who follow you will be safeguarded against all harm from evildoers.

Jesus I never promised that!

Joanna It has to be something spiritual, anyway. You said that these thieves and robbers came before you. Are you talking about false Messiahs from the past?

Jesus Possibly. They've certainly done a great deal of harm to the people.

Judas I don't think that's it. I've noticed that whenever you tell one of these parables, all the parties involved in it are usually right there in the crowd listening to you. You speak these parables directly to the people who need to hear them. So, who in the crowd was it?

Jesus I suspect you already have a guess.

Judas I do. Was it...?

Scene 3

Pharisee #1 , Pharisee #2 , Pharisee #3 , Pharisee #4 , Pharisee #5

Pharisee #1 *[in outrage]* Us? He was talking about us?

Pharisee #5 I'm sure of it. He was looking right at me when he said it.

Pharisee #2 How would he even know you were a priest? You did go in civilian cloths, didn't you?

Pharisee #4 Actually - I might have told one of his followers who we were.

Pharisee #1 *[angrily]* Exactly what possessed you to do that?

Pharisee #4 I'm sorry! This person seemed so nice and caring and pious, I just couldn't bring myself to lie.

Pharisee #2 *[disappointedly]* That spoils the experiment.

Pharisee #3 How so?

Pharisee #2 Well, we wanted to get an idea of what he's been preaching to the people. But if he knew we were in the crowd, he might have altered his sermon to pass our scrutiny.

Pharisee #3 *[with perverse delight]* Oh, I'd say he altered his sermon, all right, but not to please us!

Pharisee #5 Then you agree with me?

Pharisee #1 *[in cold fury]* It's obvious. He went out of his way - to insult us!

Scene 4

James , Jesus , Joanna , Judas , Peter

- James** There were Pharisees in the crowd? Where? I checked the people out pretty carefully as they arrived.
- Joanna** They were dressed in normal clothes. I only knew they were there because one of them struck up a conversation with me.
- Judas** *[delightedly to Jesus]* So am I right? Were they your targets? I watched them pretty carefully after Joanna told me they were out there, and it seemed to me like you spoke those words about "thieves and robbers" directly to them! And you should have seen the face of the one guy when you said it. He knew you were talking about him! Oh, wait, you *did* see his face, because you were looking right at him! Right? Right?
- Jesus** *[coyly]* Certainly, there are many religious leaders who only seek to profit from their positions.
- Joanna** But not the one I spoke to. Rabbi, he was a good man, I'm sure of it.
- James** If he was dressed in normal clothes, he was spying on us! That doesn't seem very "good" to me.
- Peter** All right. So the rabbi is the shepherd, or maybe the gate, or maybe both. And the sheep are either us or the people. Or maybe both. And the thieves and robbers are the false Messiahs, or the Pharisees, or maybe both, but not all of them. I wish we'd never started this! I thought I understood it fine before.
- Judas** Actually, here's another question. (Sorry, Peter!) Who are the hirelings? These guys who are hired to watch the sheep but run at the first sign of trouble: are they us?

Scene 5

Pharisee #1 , Pharisee #2 , Pharisee #3 , Pharisee #4 , Pharisee #5

Pharisee #5 If he didn't mean for us to be the thieves and robbers, then he certainly meant for us to be the hirelings.

Pharisee #2 Yeah, I have to admit it: that's pretty clear. But so what? We're here to judge whether he's a danger to the community or not. Not whether we like him or he likes us.

Pharisee #1 *We* are the guardians of the community! If he has no respect for our leadership, he *is* a danger.

Pharisee #3 *[dryly]* But maybe only a danger to our leadership.

Pharisee #4 The follower I spoke to was the farthest thing from a danger! In fact, she turned out to be a respected member of society.

Pharisee #5 *[incredulously]* One of his followers was a woman?

Pharisee #1 *[incredulously - and with an edge of threat]* And you spoke with her?

Pharisee #4 *[in anxious defense of his actions]* She wasn't just any woman; she was the wife of Herod's steward!

Pharisee #2 Chuza's wife?

Pharisee #3 *[thoughtfully]* Curiouser and curiouser.

Pharisee #1 *[to the two spies]* Is that it?

Pharisee #5 No, there was one more thing. I didn't know what to make of it, but at one point, he began talking about dying!

Scene 6

James , Jesus , Joanna , Judas , Peter

James We're not the hirelings, are we? We would never bail if danger approached! We're really more like co-shepherds, right?

Jesus Well, that's the question. Sometimes, it's necessary for the shepherd to defend the sheep with his life, and when that happens, you find out whether you were a shepherd or a hireling all along. *[solemnly]* As I said earlier today: I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No 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.

Joanna Are you...are you still talking about shepherds and sheep?

Peter We'll never desert you! Even if the Roman army itself were to come marching against you!

Jesus Is that so? Good! Then all will be well.

Judas Does that mean you won't die, after all?

James *[scolding]* Judas, what are you saying!

Judas *[carefully to Jesus]* I not *hoping* you'll die! It's just that your wording has me a little confused. When you say, "I lay down my life," do you mean that you *would* lay down your life for the sheep if circumstances demanded it, or do you mean, "I'm *going to* lay down my life?"

Scene 7

Pharisee #1 , Pharisee #2 , Pharisee #3 , Pharisee #4 , Pharisee #5

Pharisee #1 Time to vote! I, of course, vote that we continue the investigation. I think the man might not only be heretical and disrespectful, but demon possessed!

Pharisee #5 I concur. We should not only keep on investigating, but begin to build a formal case against him, in case we need to put him down quickly.

Pharisee #2 I vote No. He's just another rabbi with his own little following, and his teachings seem harmless enough. Some of them are pretty good, in fact.

- Pharisee #4** I agree. He did nothing but encourage the people today, though some of the things he said were a little confusing.
- Pharisee #1** *[to Pharisee #3]* As always, it comes down to you. *[in disgust]* I suppose you'll vote No because you don't care who challenges our authority. You'd love it if this man bad mouthed us up and down the length of land!
- Pharisee #2** Criticism of our leadership is not a crime! I see no evidence that he's a threat to the people themselves.
- Pharisee #3** My vote...is that we close the investigation...and kill him right now!
- Pharisee #4** What?
- Pharisee #5** Look, I think it might come to arresting him some day, but killing him outright without more information?
- Pharisee #1** So you *were* upset by his jibes!
- Pharisee #3** No, no, it wasn't his anti-establishment talk. *[to Pharisee #1]* Your skin is far too thin! All you care about is your own dignity, when there's far more at stake. *[to Pharisee #2]* And no, the risk is not that he'll teach the people not to be nice! *[to all]* Have none of you considered the signs? Can none of you see the big picture? One: he has no fear of us. Two: he has a powerful mind capable to devising a subtle and ambiguous jibe at us on the spur of the moment. Three: He seems himself as the shepherd of a flock that includes other flocks all combined into one. Four: He seems himself as a martyr. Five: he sees himself has having power over life and death! *[pausing for a reply]* Don't you see? This is not some heretical teacher we're dealing with, but a would-be Messiah! And if he brings the Romans down on us, you can be sure that our dignity will be tarnished, and the people greatly hurt - when we're all dead!

You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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