

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible, light a candle beside it, and pray the gathering litany that lists Christological titles for Jesus in John’s gospel. Take turns naming Jesus’ titles below. All respond to each.

1. Word and Wisdom who came down from heaven and dwelt among us.

ALL: Make your home with us.

2. Choice wine that fills a new community with Holy Spirit.

3. Son of Man and Son of God.

4. Bread of life.

5. Living water.

6. Light of the world.

7. Savior of the world.

8. The resurrection and the life.

9. Good shepherd.

10. Seed that falls into the ground to grow a hundredfold.

11. The way, the truth, and the life.

12. Lasting friend.

John’s gospel makes an extended comparison between Jesus and shepherds who pasture, protect, and water their flocks and who at night sleep in the opening of the sheepfold and become its gate. In John 10, from which the Church reads this Sunday, Jesus is both the good shepherd and the gate to the sheepfold.

Few of us pasture sheep today. Some of us who have pets know the daily care our animal kin require.

If we think about who are good shepherds today,

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

we may first think of crossing guards herding little kids across intersections. Or, we may think of social workers who help the homeless find shelter and permanent housing and help elderly people stay in their homes. Since this Sunday is Mother’s Day, we may remember the countless times our mothers gathered us for meals, our regular family experience of belonging.

Nobel Laureate Norman Borlaug enlarges our sense of who leads and shepherds in our world. He is the good scientist who feeds and protects people and calls us to use our gifts in care for one another.

Borlaug put his brains and energy to work so that millions on our planet home might eat. When he finished his doctorate, famine seemed inevitable in nations where population was outrunning food production, such as Mexico, India, Pakistan, and African countries.

Mexico and the Rockefeller Foundation hired the young scientist to improve wheat production.



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Stem rust had wiped out crops in Mexico three years in a row. Borlaug grew two crops of wheat a year, one in the highlands of the north and one in the south. In the north he created plants that resisted rust but grew too tall. He crossed the wheat with shorter wheat from Japan. In the south the wheat adapted to a different climate and developed the capacity to thrive and provide food anywhere.

Borlaug became known as the father of the green revolution, a farmer who saved millions from starvation. He may have saved more lives than anyone else is history. “Food is first,” he insisted. “Without food the world will have more chaos. Food is a moral right.”

● Who do you lead and care for like a shepherd?



GOSPEL

Jesus and his Father are one.



JESUS: My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.

John 10.27-30

hand or his Father's hand. These consoling promises make a comforting funeral gospel; our relationship with Jesus and his father is intimate and eternal.

- What divides people today in our churches?
- Where do you experience belonging?
- What relationships do you celebrate on Mother's Day?

In verse 22, the scene shifts to Solomon's Portico at the temple. There "Jews" (this term in John means those who follow Moses) ask Jesus to stop keeping them in suspense and answer plainly if he is the messiah. This is the point at which Sunday's gospel begins. Jesus' words are plain but theologically loaded.

"My sheep hear my voice," Jesus says. Hearing is believing. Those who believe recognize that Jesus reveals God. They accept his teaching. "I know them, and they follow me," Jesus adds. To know refers to deeply personal belonging. To follow expresses wholehearted allegiance.

Then Jesus makes two parallel promises. First he promises believers eternal life. No one will snatch them from his hand. Then he underscores his promise with the Father's guarantee. No one will snatch believers from the Father's hand either. These promises lead to the chapter climax in which Jesus speaks in simple words the inflammatory claim: The Father and I are one.

Jesus' hearers reach for rocks to stone him for

Jesus' messianic identity causes division.

Throughout chapter 10, John's gospel uses shepherding imagery to describe Jesus' relationship with those who believe in him. It's an intimate, divisive, elaborate metaphor. Intimacy grows out of shepherds and sheep sharing life together.

In the first ten verses Jesus explains he is the gate of the sheepfold, literally its door. Shepherds sleep in the doorway of the sheepfold and literally become its gate. Sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd and survive by following where the shepherd leads—to fresh pasture, to water, into a pen for the night. The sheep have faith in the shepherd who comes to give them abundant life.

In the next eight verses (11-18), Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for this sheep. He contrasts himself with hired

hands who run when wolves threaten the flock. Jesus' relationship with believers is intimate. "I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father" (14-15). Belonging of this kind happens in families.

Jesus is talking in this chapter to the same group of Pharisees who in chapter 9 interrogate the man born blind and put him out of the synagogue for believing in Jesus. Jesus' claim that believers share the same intimate belonging he shares with his Father divides this community. Some think he is possessed; others that he is out of his mind (10.19-21)

Sunday's short gospel passage comes next. Set apart from the fuller context of the chapter, these words speak promise and comfort. Jesus know us, his followers; we know him. We believers will never perish. No one can snatch us from Jesus'



blasphemy, for making himself one with and equal to God. Jesus asks them to consider his works. “If I do the works of God, put faith in them” (10.38). They try to arrest him but he escapes.

● **What does Jesus’ claim that “the Father and I are one” mean to you?**

● **What insights into our relationship with God do you find in the imagery of the good shepherd?**

In the daily work of a shepherd John’s gospel sees the redeeming work of the preexistent Word, who became flesh to dwell among us. In John’s gospel the opening verses proclaim Jesus is the pre-existent Word from above. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and

the Word was God” (1.1). John identifies Jesus with the Word who was with God from the beginning and became flesh to dwell among us and reveal God. He is God.

Theologians use the term

Christology to name reflection about who Jesus is. Theologian Karl Rahner identifies two main kinds of Christology—high and low. A low Christology starts from below, from the events of Jesus’ life that unfold and reveal who he is. Jesus is from Nazareth, teaches and heals in Galilee, confronts religious officials in Jerusalem who find him guilty of blasphemy. He is put to death and rises on the third day. His resurrection reveals he is messiah and God. This is Jesus’ story as the three synoptic gospels tell it—a low Christology.

The community out of which John’s gospel emerges has a high Christology; Jesus is from above. He preexists with the Father. All things come into being through him (John 1.3). No one has seen God but the

only Son reveals God (John 1.18). Faith in Jesus and his works is faith in God.

The high Christology of John’s community creates hostility with other Jews. In fact, Jesus’ claims in Sunday’s gospel are fighting words to many listeners—blasphemous, stoning words.

● **Who is Jesus to you? Does his identity flow more from his life and ministry or more from being the Word who was with God from the beginning?**

The Acts of the Apostles and Luke’s gospel form a closely parallel, two-volume work. Luke sees the activity of the Spirit evident in Jesus’ life and mission continuing in the life and mission of the Church.

The gospel begins with Jesus receiving the Spirit at his baptism. Filled with the Spirit, Jesus goes to his hometown synagogue, reads from the scroll of Isaiah, and announces that he fulfills this prophecy. He has come, as the scriptures say, to bring good news to the poor, sight to the blind, liberty to captives (4.18-19). The hometown folks reject him and seek to stone him.

In Acts, Luke constructs the same order. The Spirit comes upon Jesus’ disciples on Pentecost; Peter and the others begin preaching how Jesus’ resurrection from the dead fulfills prophecy. Some believe and are baptized; others reject the message. Jesus’ disciples work miracles. Officials arrest them. Opponents stone the deacon Stephen to death in Acts 7.

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DO SOMETHING

- **Magnus MacFarlane Barrow started Mary’s Meals to feed hungry children in Bosnia. Today Mary’s Meals feeds more than 1,300,000 hungry children every day they go to school in countries such as Haiti and Malawi. Visit Marysmeals.org to learn about their mission and where they work.**

Paul preaches Jesus' Word.

When the focus shifts from Peter's mission to Paul's in Acts 13, Luke repeats the pattern. Paul's story parallels the beginning of Jesus' and Peter's ministries. Ananias teaches him about Jesus. Paul is filled with the Spirit, is baptized, and begins preaching.

In Acts 13 the community in Antioch of Syria sends Paul with Barnabas, both filled with the Spirit, on the first missionary journey to the Gentiles (13.4). Paul preaches in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia (Turkey today). In Luke's familiar patterns some believe and some violently reject the gospel message. Sunday's first reading begins after Paul's sermon to the Antioch Christians.

Paul begins preaching.

Many of the Jews and devout Gentile God-fearers followed Paul and Barnabas. They spoke to them and urged them to hold fast to the grace of God. The following sabbath, almost the entire city gathered to hear the word of God.

When the Jews saw the crowds, they became jealous and countered whatever Paul said, contradicting and defaming him. Speaking boldly, Paul and

Barnabas said, "It was necessary for the word of God to be declared to you first, but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For thus has the Lord commanded, I have made you a light to the nations, a means of salvation to the ends of the earth."

The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord. All who were destined for life everlasting believed. The word of the Lord was carried through the whole region. But some of the Jews stirred up devout, influential women and leading men in the city, excited persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and threw them out of their territory.

So the two shook the dust from their feet in protest and went on to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 13.14,43-52

- How do you witness to the life-giving power of God evident in creation and Jesus' resurrection?
- Where do you see the Spirit at work in our Church today?
- Why do we resist the work of the Spirit?



Paul's journeys go out from Antioch in Syria, a rich farming area whose Christians helped fund his missionary trips to spread the gospel.

PRAY

Stand in a circle, raise your arms, and extend your hands over one another in blessing.

LEADER: May the Spirit bless us and animate the lives of those whom we love.

Take turns stating your petitions and prayers. After each, repeat:

ALL: Fill them with Wisdom and Spirit.



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