

The Shepherd's Voice

John 10:1-10

Introduction

(Recite the 23rd psalm as a congregation)

- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- ² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
he leadeth me beside the still waters,
- ³ he restoreth my soul.
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.
- ⁴ Yea, though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff,
they comfort me.
- ⁵ Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies.
Thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup overfloweth.
- ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

As the story goes, once upon a time there was a town hall meeting at which two people were called upon to recite from memory this very famous psalm.

- One was a well-trained actor who happened to be appearing in the town that week. He delivered those beautiful words with all the proper intonation and emphasis, pausing at exactly the correct moments to deliver maximum impact.
 - Those who listened beamed with pleasure as he spoke with perfect elocution.
- The other person who recited the psalm was not a trained professional orator. In fact, he spoke in a cumbersome, almost monotone manner.
 - By the end of his recitation of the room was filled with a hushed silence. No one hardly even breathed. Tears were flowing down the cheeks of those who listened, and there was a palpable sense that they had not just heard beautiful words, they had heard God's Word.

What was the difference between the two recitations? Someone remarked afterwards: the first speaker knew the psalm, but the second speaker knew the Shepherd.

- You come to that Psalm differently if you know the Shepherd, don't you?
- I mean, after all, what is the fourth word of the Psalm?

The Lord is **MY** shepherd.

The fourth Sunday of the Easter season is always devoted to the theme of Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

- You might say that the goal of this day is to help each of us be certain that “The Lord is MY shepherd.”

So you have heard that message expressed in the songs we have sung and in the Scriptures we have read. My message this morning focuses on the Gospel text in John 10.

Now, if you have been a part of this church for any length of time, you have heard me repeatedly say, “What’s the context? What light does the context shed on the passage of Scripture you are reading?”

This passage (John 10) immediately follows the story of the healing of the man born blind in John 9. I preached on that text back in Lent, on March 15th to be precise. The connection between that story and today’s text is essential for how we hear and understand what Jesus says here.

That 9th chapter ends with a bit of tension between Jesus, the formerly blind man and the religious leaders.

- The man who could not see comes to recognize Jesus, not just as a healer, but as one worthy of trust and even worship.
- Meanwhile, the religious leaders (who are certain of their own sight and authority) remain unable to perceive what is unfolding right in front of them.
- That contrast is not incidental.

So, when Jesus begins speaking about sheep and shepherds, He is not offering some abstract pastoral metaphor. He is offering an interpretation on what has just happened.

- The man born blind has heard the voice of the shepherd and followed, and he started to do it even before he had his physical sight restored.
- By contrast, the religious leaders who could see with 20/20 vision did not follow the Good Shepherd. They did not hear the shepherd’s voice. In fact, they not only refused to follow, they worked hard to keep people away from God. They discouraged faith. They restricted who had access to the Temple. They even crucified the Good Shepherd.

So here in our text Jesus refers to them, not as sheep, but as ...

All who have come before me are **thieves and robbers**, but the sheep have not listened to them. (John 10:8)

And the thing that differentiates between the blind man and the religious leaders is how they respond to the voice of the shepherd. One hears. The other does not.

The voice you hear is the voice you follow. So the voice you hear is not just important. It’s critically important. So here’s our question for the day:

In a world with so many competing voices, do we recognize, listen to, and follow the voice of our Good Shepherd?

If we hear the voice of Jesus our good shepherd, the text makes three promises to us:

PROMISE #1: IF YOU KNOW THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, HE KNOWS YOU BY NAME

Look at verse 3:

He calls his own sheep by name ... (John 10:3)

According to Google, the top five names for sheep are: Snowball, Cotton, Fluffy, Muffin and Clover.

- But when the Good Shepherd looks at me, He calls me "Tom."
- He never calls me by my brother's name. I'm Tom, not Tim. Not Sam, not Fred, not George. Not even Fluffy. It's Tom. Always Tom.

In fact, my God knows me so well, that Luke's Gospel assures me of this:

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Luke 12:6-7)

The fact that Jesus knows you by name may sound trivial to you now, but one day you will stand before the judgment seat of God to make your case for entrance to heaven. The Scriptures warn:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven... Many will say to me on that day, "Did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me..." (Matthew 7:21-23)

If Jesus knows me, then it follows that Jesus knows what is happening in my life. As the old Gospel hymn proclaims:

Jesus knows all about our struggles ...
(from *"There's Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus"* by J. Oatman)

There is such a comfort in knowing that God knows what I am going through. He understands, and He cares.

- Think about that for a minute. My troubles don't get lost in this sea of 8 billion people. Jesus sees me. He knows me. And He know all about my struggles.

PROMISE #2: IF YOU KNOW THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, HE WILL LEAD THE WAY FOR YOU

Look at verse 4:

When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger ... (John 10:4-5)

These verses echo the promise of the 23rd Psalm, don't they?

He **leadeth** me beside the still waters,
He **leadeth** me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake (Psalm 23)

And even when I face the valley of the shadow of death, I don't have to be afraid even then because ...

I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me (Psalm 23)

He is leading me through that valley, safely to the other side.

"Leading" is a key word. Sheep can be moved from place to place in one of two ways.

- In the ancient Near East, shepherds would be in front, leading their flocks. That allowed them to ensure the sheep were safe from predators and other dangers. From that vantage point the shepherd could see the good pasture.
- The more modern way is to drive the sheep from behind.
- Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, leads by example, going before His followers and preparing the way.

This is reminiscent of God leading the Israelites through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud and fire. It is also the call of discipleship for you and me:

Whoever wants to be my disciple must take up their cross and follow me... (Matthew 16:24)

Sometimes it is hard to follow. We know where we want to go, what we want to do. I have opinions, preferences, expectations.

- And sometimes it feels like God has other ideas about what I should do and where I should go.
- And as hard as it is to let go of my wishes, I need to let Him lead.
- When He leads I end up in green pastures beside still waters with a restored soul.

PROMISE #3: IF YOU KNOW THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, YOU WILL BE SAFE AND SECURE

Look at verse 9:

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. (John 10:9)

Our text depicts the sheep pen as a secure enclosure with a single entrance. The design allowed the shepherd to guard the flock effectively and prevented all thieves and predators from entering easily.

- The shepherd would sleep at the entrance.
- The flock was safe there, and could rest without a care in the world because the shepherd was on guard.

"I am the gate," Jesus says. The sheep who hear my voice and follow me will be saved and kept secure.

APPLICATION

As I close, let me leave you with a spiritual formation exercise I learned many years ago. It is a great tool to use with the struggles of this world are overwhelming. It is also a great exercise to use when you pray.

- Hold out one hand as if you had counted to five.
- Then say the first five words of the 23rd Psalm, with one word per finger (starting with your thumb). THE ... LORD ... IS ... MY ... SHEPHERD.
- When you get to the ring finger, and as you say the word "MY" grab ahold of that finger and hold on tight.
- Now, repeat those five words, emphasizing the word "MY." The Lord is **MY** shepherd.

Is that true for you? Do you hear His voice? Are you following Him today? If you want to talk about this, I'm ready to listen.

Amen.