

The Voice

A few years ago, after I finished a funeral, a man with a huge smile on his face took my hand and shook it, rather vigorously. So, I assumed this man was about to compliment me on the service and my sermon, when instead he unknowingly humbled me.

He said, "Wow, that soloist, he sure has an amazing set of pipes, doesn't he?" Well, he was talking about Les Howard, and yes, as you know, Les' "pipes" are amazing. When Les sings, his strong, beautiful voice, captures the listener's attention.

In our Gospel reading today, we hear an even more amazing voice. This voice belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. In John 10, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, and he captures our attention by calling out to us with his strong, beautiful voice.

Jesus' voice captures our attention because we are his sheep. I hope you don't mind being called sheep. At least, you didn't have to wear silly sheep ears like I did in the puppet show. But really, each one of us have sheep ears, which listen for Jesus.

So, what does Jesus say about his voice? He says the sheep (that's you and me) hear his voice when he calls out to them. He says he calls each one of us by name so he can lead us. And, he says we follow him because we know, we trust, his voice.

What Jesus is describing here is a relationship. Just like my cats, Pepper and Piper, hear me call them, and come to me because they know my voice and they trust me, so Jesus says we who are his sheep hear his voice, and we come to follow him.

I knew a farmer who raised horses. These horses, like my cats and like Jesus' sheep, knew his voice. So, he would really call them by name, and they would come to the barn from the pasture. One day I was there, he had to give one horse some medicine.

So, he called out, "Eddy, Eddy, Eddy", and within just a moment or two, sure enough, Eddy came galloping in for his medicine. He got a carrot too, so I'm sure that helped. But the point is, Eddy knew the farmer's voice, trusted him, and so he came to him.

This is the kind of relationship Jesus describes that we have with him. He is our Good Shepherd, and we are his sheep. We know his voice and are captivated by it. We trust he has good intentions for us, and so when he calls to us, we come to him.

As we continue to live through this coronavirus pandemic, and struggle with an illness called Covid-19, I'm very glad to be such a sheep, In fact, I just "wanna" be a sheep of a Good Shepherd who promises to lead me through this time. How about you?

Jesus says, "I call my sheep by name and lead them out." Did you hear those words? "I call my sheep by name and lead them out." What a promise from a Good Shepherd to his sheep. He promises to use his voice to lead us through this time, and all of life.

This is important because this coronavirus, Covid-19 is novel, it's new. It's a virus people have never faced before and it's doing things we have never seen before. So, we are muddling are way through it, best we can. Jesus says, "I will lead you out."

Now, he didn't say, "Don't use your brains, stay away from science, don't use common sense." He said, "I will lead you out." As his sheep we trust he is telling us the truth and so we him follow him, every day, as well as use common sense and read science.

Our lives in this world are like a sheep going out into the pasture. So, I find these words very comforting. Jesus says that he will lead us out into the world, as our Good Shepherd. He will talk us through and guide us through, every hardship and challenge.

This includes the coronavirus. This includes any family or marriage or personal struggles you are going through right now. Whatever you are facing, use your sheep ears, because Jesus is calling your name, and reminding you that he will be your guide.

When my son was small and finally riding a bike without training wheels, he was a little overconfident. He would zip up and down the driveways and sidewalks and occasionally, even though he was not supposed to, dart into busy 10th Avenue North.

One day I watched him leave the driveway and head into the street with a car soon coming. I yelled, "Michael, get out of the street!" He looked up and saw the car, and quickly adjusted his course to avoid the oncoming vehicle. It might have been different.

But Michael heard my familiar voice call out his name, a voice he trusted. He followed what I said, and he was safe. Jesus does this for us too, as our Good Shepherd. He uses his voice to protect us from any sort of oncoming trouble in our world.

Jesus, using figures of speech, refers to such oncoming trouble as strangers, thieves, and bandits. He reminds us to stay away from them because they may harm us. But he also reminds us, he will use his voice as I did with Michael, to help and save us.

In fact, Jesus says thieves comes only to steal, kill, and destroy, but "I come that you may have life, and have it abundantly". In other words, Jesus, unafraid of the hardships and challenges we face, promises to save us from them and give us abundant life.

And so, with our sheep ears, we listen for the voice of Jesus, who is indeed our Good Shepherd. We listen for a voice we recognize and trust. We listen for a voice which captivates us, and which has already in many times and places rescued us from harm.

This voice will save us from sin, evil and death. This voice will save us from coronavirus and Covid-19. This voice will save us from any trouble we face in life which hurts us. This voice, one day, will awaken us, and welcome us into God's heavenly home.

This voice belongs to Jesus, our Lord, Savior, and Good Shepherd. He says to us today, "Do not be afraid, I am with you." He says, "Come and follow me, I will lead you out. I will bring you home." He says, "I love you, little sheep, you are mine."

Wow, that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, he sure has an amazing set of pipes, doesn't he?
Amen.