

April 26, 2015
John 10:11-18

Easter 4B
Voices are Everywhere

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

One year ago I heard a voice I will never soon forget. It was Saturday evening, and the voice on the answering machine was Pastor Bohler, letting me know that the Saints of God at Trinity and St. Paul in Fisher and Euclid, MN voted to extend me the Call to be your next pastor. That's just one of the voices that is in my life, that I thank God for.

Can you count the number of voices you hear on a given day? Just think about how many voices you have heard already today. Your family, voices on the radio, internet, and TV, and voices here at church. Voices are everywhere. Perhaps you've heard a hundred voices are more today. Voices come in all shapes and sizes, some voices are used for good and others for bad. Some voices are silenced and other voices ring through a noisy crowd. Some of the most familiar voices you can pick out of a crowd, just about anywhere.

Your voice is important, the voices you hear around you influence you. What voices do you turn to?

Today in our gospel reading from John 10, we read about a voice, a voice of someone very very special. The voice of the Good Shepherd. This voice is the best voice one could possibly hear, the voice of the one that loves you unconditionally. Yes, we hear His voice, His voice is one amongst many, but He uses it to Call out His Sheep.

Sheep tend to get a bad rap in sermons. Sheep by and large in sermons are called dumb and stupid animals, rightly so. They don't have much intelligence, but there is something special about sheep. Throughout Scriptures, God calls His people sheep. Sheep are clean animals, unlike pigs and dogs. St. Peter mentions a proverb in his second letter when he writes: *"²⁰ For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. ²¹ For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²² What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."*¹

Sheep are clean animals, they don't do what dogs and pigs do. Sheep are also defenseless and they desperately need the care of a shepherd. Not just a hireling, not just someone who is caring for them only when times are good, but when times get bad and the sheep and hireling are threatened, the hireling runs away.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (2 Pe 2:20–22). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Sheep are also prone to wander and must often be searched for and brought back. We read about that in the Parable of the Lost Sheep. You know where shepherd leaves the 99 to search out the one that is lost. This is typically the characteristic where we say sheep are dumb and stupid. Sheep though are prone to wander.

Sheep are also peaceful animals, useful to the shepherd. Sheep aren't in the realm of a lion, bear, or snake. They are animals that are peaceful by and large.

As you can see the characteristics of the sheep, one can also see characteristics of God's people. God's people are clean. We'll talk more about that in a minute. God's people are peaceful.

What gets us in trouble is the fact that we are defenseless and that we like to wander. That happened to the Children of Israel in the Old Testament. How many times did God's people wander away from God, searching after other gods? How many times do we see them as defenseless people when God took away the military power of the leaders? Time after time again. When the people are led by a hireling, all that is being done is leading them further and further into despair.

We can also see us here as well. As God's people alive today, we are prone to wander. We are prone to walk away from God. We are prone to experiment with different dangerous things. We are prone to follow after the voices of the world. Sometimes these voices become all too familiar to us. These are voices that can bring us down and lead us further away from the truth. These are the voices you hear in classrooms as teachers teach that evolution is truth, that marriage between two men and marriage between two women is okay. You hear voices in the political arena that are belittle our religious freedoms that this country was founded on. You hear so many voices. Perhaps you even hear the voice that says, "Did God really say, you shouldn't..." The voice of Satan becomes all too familiar in our world today, and it's troublesome. We know his voice way to well.

How do you hear his voice, what is he saying to you? "Did God really say, you should be in church often and remember the Sabbath day?" "Did God really say, you should only have sex with your spouse?" "Did God really say, you shouldn't look at your friend's paper to get an answer?" "Did God really say this?" "Did God really say that?" A voice that becomes so frequent in our ears and it causes us to doubt and fall into a trap and perhaps even move us to a cliff where we can run right off into our demise.

Sheep even though as they are characterized to wander as we often do, have the characteristic of being clean. God gave them that characteristic in Leviticus. Sheep are good for you, they are clean animals, which means they can be eaten. Sheep are clean and useful to the Shepherd for another reason, a far more important reason, when we see that sheep are God's people.

In our text, Jesus uses His voice and says, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...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 my sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to me voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” Jesus the Good Shepherd uses His voice to tell the people, that He knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. This is much more than some intellectual awareness, but this speaks of an intimate relationship between God and His people, between the Shepherd and the sheep. Warren Wiersbe in his commentary writes: “The Eastern shepherd knows his sheep personally and therefore knows best how to minister to them.” Being a shepherd is about serving the flock, but it’s also having a very deep relationship with the flock.

Jesus, being the Good Shepherd, knows His sheep. He knows them personally, He knows their names. He calls people by their names, think of Simon, whom God changed his name to Peter, think of the wee little man Zaccheus or think of Mary Magdalene in the Garden on that first Easter morning when Jesus uses His voice and says, “Mary.” Mary immediately recognized Jesus, because she knows His voice.

By and large in the world that we live in, we are not identifiable with a name, more so with a number, Social Security Number, Student ID number, Federal Employee ID number, bank account number, Driver’s License number and so on. It’s comforting to know that even in this world of being known as a number, Jesus Christ knows us by our name. He has a relationship with us. The ones closest to us call us by different names, depending upon our relationship with them. Hannah and Miriam call me daddy, my parents call me son, Emily calls me husband, and you all call me pastor, many others call me friend.

I thank God, that He knows me by my name and He even uses it to Call me by name. Names are so very important.

He doesn’t just know our names, but He knows our natures. Wiersbe talks about it in this way, “While all sheep are alike in their essential nature, each sheep has its own distinctive characteristics; and the loving shepherd recognizes these traits. One sheep may be afraid of high places, another of dark shadows. A faithful shepherd will consider these special needs as he tends his flock.” Indeed our Lord and Savior, our Good Shepherd knows our characteristics and uses them. Think how God used the 12 apostles in their own unique circumstances, “Peter was impulsive and outspoken, while Thomas was hesitant and doubting, Andrew was a ‘people person’ who was always bringing somebody to Jesus, while Judas wanted to ‘use’ people in order to get their money for himself. Jesus knew each of these men personally, and He knew how to deal with them.”

Jesus also knows all of you very well. He knows your characteristics, your personalities and helps you use those things for the benefit of His kingdom. Some of you are like Andrew being a people person. Others are more introverted like I am, while still others are musical and so forth.

As Jesus knows us best, our personalities, characteristics, etc. He also knows our needs. He knows what we need. He knows that we need His love and forgiveness the most. That's why He came to this earth to live, to suffer and to die, and to rise again to life to forgive those sins and grant us life. Jesus Christ cares for you so much that He takes care of your needs, first and foremost your spiritual needs, but He also very much aids you in your physical needs, providing places for you to live, clothes to wear, and food to eat. He knows your needs and will ultimately provide you your greatest need of life again, when you face your own death. He will raise you up again, because your Good Shepherd laid down His life for you and took it up again.

As the shepherd cares for the sheep, they get to know him as well. As Jesus cares for you, you get to know him better. Wiersbe comments, "The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. They get to know Him better by listening to His voice (the Word) and experiencing His daily care. As the sheep follows after the Shepherd, they learn to love and to trust Him. He loves "His own" and He shows that love in the way He cares for them."

Even in a world where voices are all around you, voices that are trying to drown out the voice of the Shepherd in your life, know this. Jesus Christ knows you and uses His voice to call you by your name. He first did this through the hands of a faithful under shepherd who took water along with God's voice, the Word of God and baptized you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He still uses His voice when He grants His under shepherd the ability to be His voice and grant you forgiveness of sins in the Holy Absolution. He still uses His voice when He uses His under shepherd as He says these words, "Take Eat, This is my Body. Take Drink, this is my blood." God's voice continues to be living and active. You know that voice. You recognize His voice, because you are one of His sheep. You are one of those chosen by Him to be His special people.

We thank God for His Voice and the voice that He continues to call us by name out of the shadow of death into His marvelous light and life.

We thank God that His voice can drown out any other voice in our lives.

We thank God that Jesus uses His voice for our good and our benefit, even as He did to Mary on that first Easter when He says, "Mary." We thank God for His voice and for Him declaring Himself to be our Good Shepherd, so that as our shepherd He will continue to care and guide us to fine pastures and springs of living waters.

In Jesus Name, the one who uses His voice to declare to His love for you.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!** Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Risen Lord and Savior.
Amen.*