

Year C*Easter 4*2010*Listening to the Voice of Jesus
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Whose voice will we listen to?

In many ways that's the most important question there is.

Whose advice will we take?

Whose leading will we follow?

Whose witness will we believe?

Whose opinion of us will matter the most to us?

Whether it be a mentor, a coach, a therapist, a friend, an inner voice,
Whose voice will we listen for?

I think we are here because we all believe to some extent that we want to listen to the voice of Jesus. There is something about the word that he is that attracts us.

It may be

his courage,

his closeness to God,

his ethic of love and forgiveness,

his willingness to give his life for others,

his love for people who have been pushed to the edges,

his continuing presence and power.

It may be a specific action as when he asked forgiveness for those who were nailing him to the cross.

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."¹

It may be a doctrine that developed to proclaim the mystery of his life,
Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man. . . (from the "Chalcedonian Definition")

The mystery of Christ Jesus is so deep and so wide, we can be drawn to him from so many different angles. But something about him as called us.

Very literally in today's gospel Jesus is speaking of us.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²

¹*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Lk 23:33-34). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

²*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 10:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

We have all heard his voice and are following.

We may not be able to agree precisely what is most important to believe or follow but what seems immensely encouraging to me is that we are all listening to the same voice. Maybe hearing different things but listening to the same Jesus.

This is accomplished in so many ways.

Every Sunday morning revolves around some greatly loved and richly contemplated story of the Savior. The Fourth Sunday of Easter always has us contemplate Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Every priest then struggles to relate that story to our times and to his or her own spiritual life..

Every music director carefully chooses hymns which connect us back with the worshipping community's historic meditation on that particular gospel story.

So this morning we sing one of my favorite hymns:

The King of Love my shepherd is
whose goodness faileth never,
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.

Through word, song and sermon the Shepherd speaks to us.

Then we recite the ancient creed of the church, the Nicene Creed. So often I am relieved when my part of the liturgy, the sermon, is over and we can relax into the ancient moment of deep reverence when we join with generations of Christians and proclaim our faith. Again, we may not be able to absolutely agree on a precise interpretation of the mysteries of the creeds but we can allow our minds to rest a while in our shared profession of faith.

Then comes the prayers, the offertory and the great sacramental moment when time is erased and we are taken back to the night he was betrayed, and he is brought forward into our present lives, our present sorrows, our present joys.

The shepherd comes to us and takes us to him in the sacrament of his body and blood.

Finally the one Shepherd sends us out to serve the world in his name where **we** become his voice, to our families, our classmates, our workmates, to strangers and friends, to rich and poor, to young and old.

What is unique about us is not that we agree on every thing but that we are listening to One Shepherd.

We want Jesus to lead us through struggles, through disagreements,

through life to
God's will,
God's Kingdom,
God's way.

We are willing to be lead by Jesus. All of us.

It's not easy, to be sure. We sometimes look more like a flock of cats than a flock of sheep.

There's a comedian I have not thought of for years, Ken Davis. I first heard him when I was working with youth in the Diocese of Colorado. He saw so much humor in the Bible and in the spiritual life.

He particularly took issue with God's insistence that we are his sheep. Mr. Davis had a low opinion of sheep. He claimed sheep:
mindlessly follow each other,
get into trouble easily,
are terribly fearful,
and die easily.

Then he says, "We're not like that. . . are we?"
He didn't want to be a sheep.
This is what he said.

Everywhere I looked in the scriptures we are described as sheep. The Old Testament is full of sheep.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters. . .³

Do you know why the shepherd leads the sheep beside **still** waters. . . because sheep don't like to get their noses wet. What kind of animal is that!?

So the shepherd takes rocks and builds a little damn to create a still pool so the sheep won't be frightened by. . . the fast-moving water.

I wanted to be a different animal. I didn't want to be a sheep so I looked in the back of my bible which has this concordance-thing which shows you how to find words in the bible and do you know the word "German Shepherd" doesn't occur anywhere in the Old or New Testament.

So I decided I wanted to be a lion.

³*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ps 23:1-2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

A lion doesn't care if it gets it's nose wet. If a lion comes up a place of still water, he roughs it up before he drinks, just to show how tough he is.

I want to be a lion.

So I looked in the New Testament because. . . it's . . .new. . . and I found a lion verse and I read it. It's from First Peter.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep vigilant. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.⁴

All that was Ken Davis. (From *Super Sheep*)

I'm not sure how much of what he says is true of sheep. But apparently it is true what Jesus says of sheep, that sheep know their shepherds voice.
My Sadie dog knows my voice. She's no sheep but when she hears my voice she can fly. I used to have a beautiful palomino horse, Feather, and Feather knew my voice. Feather and I actually herded cattle, not sheep.

Sheep know their shepherds voice.

Apparently in the old days and sometimes still shepherds mixed their flocks during the day but when night came each would call their own sheep to them and the sheep knew and know the voice of their shepherd and would separate from the other sheep and follow their shepherd to the fold.

I know it's terribly difficult at times to discern the voice of our good Shepherd,
the voice that sustains us,
encourages us,
forgives us,
kick us in our sheep pants and gets us going,
but we also know that voice and seek to follow it.
I want to celebrate this morning that we do know the voice of Jesus,
we do respond,
we do follow.

Our Shepherd is calling us;
through the scriptures,
through our prayers and hymns,
through this sermon,
through the sacrament and
through the service we will render others in his name.

⁴*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Pe 5:6-8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

He calls us and we know his voice.
When we are lost we know his voice.
When we are frightened we know his voice.
When we are led astray we know his voice.
When we are dying, we know his voice.
And we follow.