

Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 7, 2017

St. John 10:1-10

The Familiar Voice of the Good Shepherd Leads the Way

Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Isn't it good to hear a familiar voice? We equate the voice with the person behind it. If we have been among strangers for a while, that familiar voice means someone we know and love is now with us. The familiar voice of mom or dad in the dark is a great comfort to a fearful child jerked awake by a nightmare. The friend behind a familiar voice is the one we trust and follow.

The Word of God is Jesus' voice. We recognize it and follow it because it is familiar to us. We hear it often. We are not led astray when we follow it. Jesus' voice comforts us when we are fearful. We may distinguish our Good Shepherd's voice from other voices much as sheep do with their own shepherd's voice.

Using two figures of speech in a discussion with the Pharisees, our Savior teaches this lesson. **The Familiar Voice of the Good Shepherd Leads the Way.** It is a voice we recognize. It is a voice that gives us life. It is a voice that calls us to have life, and have it to the full.

The Pharisees just had interviewed a man Jesus had healed of his life-long blindness. There were two opposing reactions to this miracle. The man who had been blind now could see. He also had new spiritual sight and believed in Jesus. The Pharisees could see only their own righteousness and now went deeper into their spiritual blindness that would not see Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus used two "I am" statements" to get the Pharisees to see the error of their ways and repent. Jesus' words lead us away from ourselves to use the only gate into the kingdom of God, and follow the only voice that leads to life. Our risen Savior, Jesus Christ, is both the gate to the sheep pen and the Good Shepherd who leads us into it. All other voices are the voices of strangers who are thieves and robbers.

There was only one entrance, or gate into a sheep pen in Jesus' day. At times the shepherd would stand in that entrance guarding it. We could say in that sense the shepherd was the gate. Jesus said, "I am the gate for the sheep." He is the only way into the kingdom of God. Jesus is the only way into God's eternal presence. There are not many gates or many ways to come to God. We come to him only through Christ.

There are thieves and robbers who try to get into the kingdom other ways. They will fail. All they will end up doing is harming the sheep. They are doing this whether they know it or not. Every false teacher is not trying to harm people's souls. However, the one behind the lie of false teaching, Satan, is harming God's people. The Pharisees, for example, were teaching salvation by works. Satan was behind this lie that was harming souls until the voice of the Good shepherd called them to follow him.

Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd," in the next verse following our lesson. He talks in those terms earlier. He is the one who leads people through him, the gate. He is out in front and the sheep who know his voice, recognize and trust the Word of God, follow him. We do not try to enter the kingdom of God any other way. We are safe from thieves and robbers because we do not listen to their unfamiliar voices; voices that point us to ourselves and away from Christ. The more familiar I am with the voice of my Good Shepherd the better equipped I am not to listen to those who harm my faith through false teachings.

Following those other voices leads to death. The Good Shepherd's voice, the Word of God, leads to eternal life. Jesus told the Pharisees that is why he had come, to speak words of life. Those who listened to his voice, recognized it as the voice of the Good Shepherd, would have that life, and have it to the full.

The Pharisees did not understand what Jesus was saying to them. They continued in their spiritual blindness. We are able to see it because like the blind man, our Savior has given us the gift of new spiritual insight. We see him as the gate and the good shepherd. We listen to his voice and follow him.

"They will come in and go out, and find pasture." Jesus leads us to the good pasture of the sweet grass of his cross and empty tomb declaring our justification. We rest by quiet thirst quenching waters, the water of life. Our good shepherd stands guard over us with his rod and staff to fend off enemies and pull us back from the precipice of the cliffs of foolish lusts and actions.

If we do not listen to his voice and wander off, we will not have life but death. To listen we must be familiar with his voice. To be familiar with his voice we must hear it often and take it to heart. All too often Jesus' sheep

go astray because they listen to a stranger's voice. Think of Eve who foolishly listened to Satan's voice. He had come to rob and steal her and humanity away from the good pasturage of the perfect creation. Sadly, he succeeded. Now we hear our Good Shepherd's voice say, "It is finished." Now we hear his voice say, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Jesus' resurrection is our life. It is a full life of daily forgiveness of sins and deliverance from evil. The so-called "abundant life" of the Christian is not a life empty of trouble and filled with only riches. It is a life of certainty and hope within earshot of our Good Shepherd's voice leading us through the gate into safety.

"He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." You are not a nameless or faceless number to the Good Shepherd. Like a human shepherd knows each lamb by name and by need, so your Savior knows your name and your needs. He calls your name and satisfies your needs. Listen for his voice! Follow his lead right through the gate into your heavenly home. Amen. <SDG>