

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

John 10

²²Then the Festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³and Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon’s Colonnade. ²⁴So the Jews gathered around Jesus, asking, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

²⁵Jesus answered them, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I am doing in my Father’s name testify about me. ²⁶But you do not believe, because you are not my sheep, as I said to you. ²⁷My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one.”



“In one ear, out the other.” I can stand here and take a deep breath and hear my mother’s voice issuing injunctions, making demands, that went in one ear, and seemingly out the other. Clean your room. Do the dishes. Defend your brother. Be nice to your sister. Eat your onions. Stop biting your nails. Can you hear your mother’s voice saying something like that? something you had no intention of really hearing?

Yet many of us would say in our heart of hearts, at our core, if our lives were demanded from us today, that our mother’s voice would come to mind. We would call in the darkness, “Mommy?” if we were truly frightened. We would love to hear her in our times of hurt and sorrow. We would cherish the very notion of hearing Mom just one more time. We would perhaps say her voice is the sweetest voice, especially when it called our name. Those are some rich vocals. Mom’s voice is a good voice.

But even a good voice can go in one ear, out the other. Even God’s voice can go in one ear, out the other. We see the conviction of unbelievers in our text to hear one thing in order to hurt the Good Shepherd, but we also see their conviction to deny anything else He might say.

We hear from the Good Shepherd essentially an invitation to hear His voice and want it, to trust it and be guided by it. In our post-Easter, empty-tomb, “Symphony of Stone” series, today we desire a good voice in this world of bad actors and faithless hired hands. Carrying the vocals today will be the Good Shepherd Himself, Jesus Christ. It is what He says that makes us long for His goodness, His shepherding, and His voice.

GOOD SHEPHERD, GOOD VOICE

It was the festival of dedication, also known as festival of lights, also known as *Hanukkah*. Jesus was Jewish, and this festival was already 190 years old. It was wet and cold, because we are told Jesus and maybe His twelve disciples were walking in the only part of the temple dating back to Solomon’s time – Solomon’s Colonnade, presumably because it was a sheltered porch. Jesus was apart from the multitudes of followers. So this was the paparazzi’s chance ... TMZ’s chance ... to catch up with Jesus and challenge Him.

They said, "*How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*" Now you can tell what kind of challengers they were from the way the question is asked and the way this account wraps up afterwards. This group of Jews asked an accusing question along with a decisive command: "*How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*" This group of Jews that approached Jesus weren't so interested in believing in Him. They weren't saying, "Answer this, and then we will be nice to you." They didn't mean to put Him on trial and give Him due process, if they didn't like the answer. No matter what Jesus said, it would be in one ear and out the other. However ... if Jesus said, "I AM," to this challenge, the stones would fly.

So you'll give Jesus credit that He used the opportunity to be a guiding hand, a clear voice, and a Good Shepherd. Jesus said, "*I did tell you, but you did not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me.*" Here Jesus leans pretty heavily into His miraculous ability, the "works" He did "*in His Father's name.*" He had demonstrated divine power in John 5 by healing a lame man, to name one specific miracle in Jerusalem. We could point out the water turned to wine, multiplied the bread and fish, and walked on water in Galilee. Here in Jerusalem He had also done a miracle no prophet of the Old Testament had done in John 9, by curing a blind man. So Jesus needed to highlight His works, or miracles, if these Jews were ever going to listen and be brought into the fold.

All the while He was doing works, Jesus was communicating His connection to the Father, "*who so loved the world,*" and offering an inviting message of salvation by faith alone in the Son, who would die that even His enemies might not perish. In chapter 5(:17), Jesus said that His Father was always working, and the Son was working too. These Jews knew exactly what Jesus was saying, that He was making Himself equal with the Father. In chapter 10 here, they began to pick up stones to throw. Jesus would actually have to perform the work of miraculously walking through the crowd in order to stay alive.

So the evidence that these challengers of Jesus didn't really trust Him—or trust in Him—was that they were not His sheep. Plain and simple, they did not desire His guidance or His good works.

Do you ever forget to hear the Good Shepherd? We would often rather try and fixate on the valleys and ditches where our Good Shepherd has led us than in the fact that He is leading us, shepherding us, and feeding us. We may take a situation as a "gotcha" scenario, "I told you so, God, because this wasn't the right way." Our attitude has been, "*The Lord is my Shepherd*, I shall want; I just know it, despite what He tells me." His guidance goes in one ear and out the other. Mothers know this in intimate ways, when they have told their children time and again the consequences of their actions. "Don't go down that road," mom says. In a fit of rebellion, children do the opposite, and they pay for it in bumps and bruises, or broken legs. In a fit of rebellion, sinners do the opposite of what the Good Shepherd tells them, and they pay for it in heartbreak and trespasses, and battered souls. Maybe you have even recognized your Good Shepherd's voice in your mother, when she demonstrated unconditional love even while telling us what to do or how to live.

What is it that marks the flock of the Good Shepherd? Jesus says, "*My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.*" This is not exactly to say that they know Him, but that Jesus knows them. He can sort them out. He knows all. Believers in Jesus are known and loved. In the shepherd's Word, wherever and whenever it is spoken, the sheep hear the Shepherd's voice, and it sticks. His voice is inexpressibly sweet and attractive to hear, and we refuse to forget it. Believers in Jesus desire to know it and we drink it in.

It's as if Jesus says, "I call, they come. I choose the path, they come after. I lead, they are safe in my care. I command in love, they respond in obedience and love. If this at times means the cross, they do not waver. One cannot hear without following nor follow without hearing." It is a simple relationship, yet a profound one.

“This lovely, delightful picture you may, if you wish, see for yourself among sheep. When a stranger calls, whistles, coaxes: Come sheep! Come sheep! it runs and flees, and the more you call, the more it runs, as if a wolf were after it, for it knows not the strange voice. But where the shepherd makes himself heard a little, they all run to him, for they know his voice. This is how all true Christians should do; hear no voice but their shepherd’s, Jesus Christ, as he himself says” (Luther).

We had this advantage in Missouri, that a real-live shepherd and his son and daughter were members. They showed sheep at 4H, and the daughter, Kristina, usually won. It was true, we were told, between the family members. If one sheep belonged to the daughter, it would listen to the daughter’s voice. If another sheep belonged to the son, it listened to his voice. They aren’t smart animals, but they do know the difference between an impostor and their very own shepherd.

If that is the case, why do we need to remember to retain the words of the Good Shepherd? Why do we need reminders to listen for His Word? We are told, in fact, twice, that “*no one can snatch them*” out of God’s hand – first the hand of the Son, then the hand of the Father. Not a single wolf, not a single false teacher, not a single enemy can paw or claw us away. However, just as the voice of the Good Shepherd can go in one ear, out the other; so also the sheep can crawl out of God’s hand. If we lose sight of our Good Shepherd, we are at fault. If we follow an impostor, it is not His fault. But He means to promise us His Gospel protection that, those who desire to stay safely, squarely in the hand of God, He will protect, preserve, and save them. Those who are careful not to let His words in one ear and out the other, He will soothe them, speak kindly to them, and restore their soul.

Do you want this Good Shepherd? Do you trust this Good Shepherd? Do you love His voice, sweetest of all? Do you cup your ears, to hear more? Do you seek to rest in His arms? Then you have all the strength of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to keep you fast.

Amen.

There is comfort in knowing that salvation does not depend on our free will. Do I want something left in my own hands to enable me to endeavor after salvation? I do not want free will. "Not merely because in the face of so many dangers, and adversities, and assaults of devils, I could not stand my ground and hold fast my 'free-will' ... but because, even were there no dangers, adversities, or devils, I should still be forced to labor with no guarantee of success, and to beat my fists at the air. If I lived and worked to all eternity, my conscience would never reach comfortable certainty as to how much it must do to satisfy God ... But now God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of His, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is faithful and will not lie to me, and that He is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break Him or pluck me from Him. 'No one,' He says, 'shall pluck them out of my hand, because my Father which gave them me is greater than all' [John 10:28-29]. Thus it is that, if not all, yet some, indeed many, are saved; whereas, by the power of 'free-will' none at all could be saved, but every one of us would perish." (Luther, Bondage of the Will. Tr. Packer & Johnson. 1957. Ed. Dillenberger, John. Selections. Anchor Books: NY. 1961. p 199.)

"The disciples of the pope help on this impious and sinful despotism when they twist and debase in their own support Christ's words, 'He that hearth you, heareth me' (Luke 10:16). For they puff out their cheeks, and cry up this passage on behalf of their usages. Yet Christ spoke these words to the apostles when they were going forth to preach the gospel and He meant them to refer to the gospel only; but the Romanists leave out the gospel and apply the words only to their own fabrications. It says again, in John 10:27: 'My sheep hear my voice, and the voice of another they do not hear.' The Romanists, therefore, leave out the gospel so that the popes may sound forth their own voice as if it were the voice of Christ Himself; nevertheless, it is their own voice which they sound, and yet they expect to get a hearing. But the apostle said that he had not been sent to baptize but to preach the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17). Therefore no one is subject to the papal traditions, nor is he required to obey the pope except when he is teaching the gospel and proclaiming Christ; and the pope ought not to teach anything except faith, and this is the freest of all things" (Luther, Pagan Servitude of the Church. Tr. and ed. Bertram Lee Woolf, 1953. Ed. Dillenberger, John. Selections. Anchor Books: NY. 1961. p 305.)