

John 10:1-10, 14-16 “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

The Voice of One Who Loves You

When my home phone rings, it's often a sales call or a recorded message from the school or a wrong number. We have caller ID, but I can't see it without my reading glasses. So I'm always pleasantly surprised when, instead of the voice of a stranger, I'm greeted by Rachel's cheerful voice or Adam calling with news of our grandson or one of my brothers calling to say hi. It's good to hear the voice of someone who loves you.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, we're reminded of the voice of the one who loves us most of all. Jesus is our Good Shepherd who tenderly calls us to come to him, to follow him, and to trust him with our lives. Today, we listen for the voice of our shepherd.

The voice of a good shepherd was, and still is, vitally important in nomadic cultures. For one thing, sheep are always led, never driven from behind. So the clear, strong voice of a shepherd is important to keep the sheep from wandering off and being lost. A shepherd talks to the sheep and sings to them. The shepherd's voice is what keeps the flock together. As the sheep follow that voice, they're led through the wilderness to green pastures, still waters, and the safety and shelter of a pen when it's time to rest.

In Jesus' day, once the sheep were in their pen for the night, a shepherd assumed another task. Out in the fields, sheep pens were usually makeshift enclosures constructed from sticks and rocks. Often, different shepherds would keep their sheep in a common pen to confine them overnight and keep predators away. The shepherds would then take turns guarding the opening to the pen, while others slept for a few hours. In that way, a shepherd would actually become the gate through which the sheep and other shepherds would pass. In the morning, when it was time to go their separate ways, each shepherd would call his sheep. No matter how many different flocks were together, the sheep would recognize the voice of their own shepherd. They would follow that voice because they knew it and trusted it. There is no sound more beautiful than the voice of someone who loves you.

Jesus is our gate, our door to eternal and meaningful life. As we listen to his voice, Jesus leads us to the safety of his shelter and then each day he calls us out again to follow his lead in everything we say and do. And there are other sheep too – others whom Jesus loves; others whom he calls to follow him; others who long to hear the voice of the one who loves them.

How does the voice of Jesus come to you? How does the sound of his love reach your ears and into your heart? As Christians in an increasingly diverse society, we can no longer assume that the voice of Jesus sounds the same to everyone. We listen in different ways; we have different needs; and yet, we are all his sheep, longing to hear his voice welcoming us home. Jesus is a Good Shepherd who knows his sheep. That means he knows your needs, he speaks your language, he sings the songs of your heart. We all have the same Shepherd who calls us with the same loving voice. That's what makes us one flock, one family of believers. But that loving voice of Jesus speaks to us in many different ways.

To a three-year old, the voice of Jesus may call like this: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong, they are weak, but he is strong.” And as the voice of Jesus calls to that child, faith is nurtured and love is born.

To someone else, the voice of Jesus may sound through the words of a familiar old hymn -- a song like “Amazing Grace” or “Beautiful Savior.”

These hymns can evoke memories of God's faithfulness over the years and of friends and family members who have followed the Shepherd with us. As the voice of Jesus calls, faith is deepened and love grows.

I've heard the voice of Jesus in the silence and in a gentle evening breeze. I've heard the voice of Jesus in the encouragement of friends. I've heard my Savior's voice through Scripture and in prayer. I've been at Youth Gatherings where I've heard the voice of Jesus in the beat of rap and in loud Christian rock bands. I've heard the voice of Jesus at multi-cultural services, as people joined in prayer, each coming to God in their own tongue. As the voice of Jesus calls, faith is ignited and love burns.

There's no sound more beautiful than the voice of someone who loves you. That loving voice of Jesus has spoken to you again and again in so many different ways. That is why you're here this morning -- because in some way, you've heard the voice of Jesus and followed him. And here, in his flock, among his people, you can hear his voice again. That voice may take many forms, yet it is the voice of one who loves you, one who knows you, one who cares for you deeply and eternally. As he speaks to you, your faith will be strengthened and your love will be empowered.

And living in the power of that love, we can do our best to help others hear the voice of Jesus as he calls to them. Some of Jesus' sheep are no longer with us at church, others have never heard the gospel, still others are

just waiting to hear Jesus' voice in a way that breaks through their defenses and speaks to their deepest needs. We are sheep who have heard the loving voice of our Shepherd. Now he wants others to join us in following him. As we welcome home each of Jesus' precious sheep, we need to remember that not everyone will hear his voice in the same way. Our liturgy and hymns, our theological formulas, our Lutheran heritage, which are all beautiful expressions of Jesus' love for us, may sound like a foreign language – strange and meaningless, to those who live outside the church. The Gospel constantly has to be communicated in new ways for those who have not yet heard. We have to ask ourselves how we can help all God's sheep follow the voice of our one Shepherd. As we do, we ourselves will be blessed to hear the voice of Jesus speaking in new ways to us.

Does that mean that we will no longer hear the voice of Jesus in ways that we've come to know and in sounds that are meaningful to us? Of course not. Jesus will continue to graciously meet our needs, even as he meets the needs of those who hear him differently. But as we reach out with his love, it *will* mean stepping out of the safety of our familiar little pen and following our Shepherd into the new pastures he has prepared for us. It *will* mean facing new challenges as individuals and as a congregation. It *will* mean taking risks and seizing opportunities to share the Gospel in new

ways with each other and with those who are still waiting to hear the Shepherd's voice.

There is no sound more beautiful than the voice of someone who loves you. And there is no task more important than helping others hear that sound for themselves. As we follow our Good Shepherd, he will bless us with his voice and lead us with all his sheep into our eternal home.

Amen.