

## Listen to the Voice of Your Shepherd

*“Lamb of God, our shepherd, keep us; let us hear your voice alone”* (528:4). In name of Jesus Christ, the shepherd of the sheep and the gate for the sheep. On this Good Shepherd Sunday, let me ask you: whose voice do you listen to? Children, do you listen to the voice of your parents and “honor, serve, and obey them, and give them love and respect”? Adults, do you still listen to the voice of your parents and find wisdom in their words even though you are no longer a child? Husbands, wives, do you listen the voice of your spouse, or have you developed a case of selective hearing? Do you listen to the voice of your friends, and can you tell the difference when their advice is good and when it’s bad? Do your ears tune into the voices of politicians, news anchors, talk radio hosts, and do you believe every word they say? Students, do you listen to your teachers; parishioners, do you listen to your pastors? Do you trust what they say? Whose voice do you listen to? There are a lot of voices out there, making a lot of noise, and it seems like everyone has something to say; and they all want you to listen. So who are you going to listen to? Whose words will you trust?

Every year on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter we turn to John 10, and we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus doesn’t call himself the Good Shepherd here in these verses; he will later on in the chapter. Here Jesus makes a really strong emphasis on listening to his voice. He says, **“The sheep listen to his voice;”** and **“His sheep follow him because they know his voice;”** and **“They will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”** The emphasis here is on Jesus’ voice. These words come right on the heels of John 9 where – do you remember what happened in chapter 9? That’s where Jesus gave eyesight to the man born blind. But do you remember the voices? The Pharisees’ voices accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath and being a sinner; they harassed and mocked the blind man and interrogated his parents; they said, **“You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!”** (34); and then they kicked the man out of church!

So with those wicked voices still ringing in his ears, today Jesus says, **“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.”** And later, **“All who have come before me are thieves and robbers.”** This is direct censure of the Pharisees. But it’s also a clear warning for you and me: be careful whom you listen to! There are voices and messages and messengers all around us that are downright dangerous, that will rob us of the peace and security of the gospel that Christ intends for us to have. **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”** You have real enemies lurking around you, and what makes them dangerous is what they say – false doctrine, false teachers, false shepherds that lead people astray. Jesus calls them “thieves, robbers, strangers,” those who climb into the sheep pen by some other way – like the Pharisees back then, and like any religious leaders in the church today who twist the message of Scripture to conform to modern philosophy, and like the many voices in our christless culture that proclaim a message contrary to the gospel. There are so many voices in our world trying to silence Christ and promote diabolical falsehood. And people listen! And they follow. And sometimes we do too, because sometimes the falsehood isn’t always so obvious. Sometimes it’s pretty subtle, nuanced, difficult to distinguish from what is pure and right. You have to listen carefully, with discretion. Otherwise you might not notice the robber climbing into the sheep pen to steal, kill, and destroy your faith.

Listen to what the Lord said about the false shepherds of Israel back in Ezekiel 34: **“Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock”** (2, 4, 10) – like the Pharisees that harassed the blind man; and the Sanhedrin that crucified Jesus; and any promoters of falsehood today who lead Jesus’ sheep astray. Jesus calls them strangers. **“[The sheep] will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”** Stranger danger! Run away! That’s what Jesus wants you to do when you hear an insidious message presented as truth – high tail it out of there!

But don’t just run away. Run to the voice that you know. Listen to the voice of your shepherd. **“The sheep listen to his voice... His sheep follow him because they know his voice.”** And later on in the chapter Jesus says, **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me”** (27). Ancient shepherds would simply call out with their voice, and their sheep would follow because they knew the voice and trusted the

voice. What does the voice of Jesus sound like, the voice that you know and trust? Jesus' voice is the voice that says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love and have chosen you before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in my sight" (cf. Jer 31:3; 1 Pt 1:4). "I am the one who knit you together in your mother's womb, so that you are fearfully and wonderfully made" (cf. Ps 139:13-14). "I am the one who has baptized you and cleansed you by the washing with water through the word" (cf. Eph 5:26). "When the set time had fully come, God sent me, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem you and give you adoption to sonship" (cf. Gal 4:4-5). "I am the one who made myself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant and humbled myself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (cf. Php 2:7-8). "I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!" (Rev 1:17-18). "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). "And I am the one who promises you, 'In my Father's house... you also may be where I am'" (Jn 14:2-3).

That is the voice of Jesus, your Savior, your shepherd. And you recognize that voice because you've heard it before. And you trust what he says because you know what he's done for you, laying down his life for you, and taking it up again. No one can say the things Jesus says, because no one has done the things Jesus has done – for the world, but also for you, individually. **"He calls his own sheep by name."** Jesus knows you by name! You are not just another furry, fluffy sheep of the flock, nameless and unknown. No, Jesus knows you, everything about you: your worries and your wants; your sins and your struggles; what brings you pain and what gives you peace. He knows you better than you know yourself; and he knows exactly what you need. **"He calls his own sheep by name."** So listen to the voice of your shepherd.

Today your shepherd says, **"Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep;"** and **"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."** A bit of a shift in metaphor, from shepherd to gate. Think of a sheep pen with stone walls where a flock spends the night, and predators can't get in. The only way in is through the gate. It's like the front door of your house, or the gateway of an ancient walled city, or the armored door of a bank vault, or the portcullis of a fortified medieval castle. The purpose of any gate or door is the same: keep what's inside safe, and keep outsiders out. And so Jesus calls himself the gate for the sheep because he is the only passageway to true and eternal safety, and he is the only one who can protect us from outside spiritual dangers. He's the only true gate and the only true voice. So even if there's a slight shift in metaphor (shepherd and gate), I think the meaning is basically the same. There are a lot of shepherds you can listen to, and a lot of gates you can walk through. But only one shepherd's voice speaks the gospel, only one gate leads to eternal life. Jesus is absolutely exclusive; he is the only source of salvation. He says, **"I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me"** (Jn 14:6). There is no other gate that leads to heaven, no other voice that speaks the truth. **"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."** And whoever does not enter through Jesus or listen to his voice will not be saved.

So listen to the voice of your shepherd. There are so many voices in the world clamoring for your attention. Don't let them drown out the only voice that matters. Listen to Jesus' voice in his word. But you'll never hear his voice if you never read or study his word! Listen to Jesus' voice in worship, in the liturgy and in the hymns, in the sermon and in the Supper. But you'll never hear his voice in worship if you never come to church! There's too much at stake to tune out this voice. So listen to the voice of your shepherd. **"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing"** (Ps 23:1), because in Jesus I have everything. **"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies"** (Ps 23:5), enemies like thieves and robbers, who come **"only to steal and kill and destroy."** **"My cup overflows"** (Ps 23:5), because Jesus gives me life, life to the full. And so **"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever"** (Ps 23:6), because Christ, and Christ alone, is the voice of the gospel and the gate to eternal life. So my dear fellow sheep, listen to the voice of your shepherd.