

Easter 4A  
John 10:1-10  
Good Shepherd Sunday

Listen To This!

Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus the Christ, the Great Shepherd and Guardian of our soul. Amen.

I was a child in a time when children still ran free through their neighborhood. Our parents set boundaries, and we crossed those borders with fear and trembling, but on our block, we ranged free. We knocked on each other's doors and invited each other to come outside and play whatever it was we were playing. The doors of our houses were open and we could come in or go out with only a shout to inform Mom where we were and what we were doing.

My brother and I played a lot with the two boys – Vincent and Nick -- who lived next door. They swam in our pool, and we played football on both of our front yards or sometimes in the street. When it was time for Vince and Nick to come in their father would step outside and call them home, not with words so much, but with an unmistakable noise that I am sure could be heard for blocks. That noise, their own peculiar sound, unlike any other sound in the neighborhood or nature called them home. They responded, not with words, but with action: They ran home.

Something about that experience of coming and going with freedom, but knowing that at any time someone who loves you more than anything, someone who's been keeping an eye on you all along will appear and call you, by name or with a distinctive sound, I think shaped our understanding of identity and belonging. We were claimed. And more often or not, when we heard our call, we would run in, wash up and gather for the family meal, and then we would be in for the night. Safe at home. And that safety of home gave us courage to get up and go out again.

Traditionally, Christians set aside the fourth Sunday of the Easter season as Good Shepherd Sunday. The Gospel is taken from the tenth chapter of John's Gospel where Jesus uses a variety of images drawn from shepherding to teach about who he is and who we are in relation to him and to God. Now, I doubt few of us has much firsthand knowledge of the life and times of sheep and shepherds, but most of us know a little bit about being called, claimed, comforted, protected and provisioned – sent out to run free and called back in to feed and rest. We know about family.

And, sadly, some of us know a little about the thieves, the robbers, the bandits, the users, the abusers, the hired-hands who don't really care and even the wolves that pace around the edges of the flock, ready to consume and devour. We know their voices and distinctive sounds, too. We don't come running when they call. In fact, we often run the other way. We

know, we can recognize the sound authentic, steadfast, enduring and unconditional love in the voices of those who want us. We can distinguish the voices of love and grace from more malevolent sounds.

That is a little of what Jesus is trying to tell his disciples, then and even now. When we hear the voice of Jesus claiming us, calling us, inviting us into a new relationship, we recognize in that sound the creative voice of God claiming us as God's own children and God's family. That voice announces the end of the old and the start of something new, the promise of life in abundance, a sense of belonging to God and to each other as God's people and the freedom to go out and come in through Jesus, and like sound that Vince and Nick's Dad made, it's a sound that invites a response, not always verbal, but sometimes a response of feet, hands and heart. Jesus calls. We follow. We come in and go out into the abundance of God's good gifts and unmatched love for us. We become God's own flock, God's own family.

That is what we are talking about when we Lutherans talk church. We are speaking about the flock of those who recognize the sound of the shepherd's voice and follow him. When some talk church they talk about buildings or local assemblies, denominations or global partnerships, clergy or liturgy, creeds, social statements, policies and practices. But that's not church, really, or even church membership, for us. For us, God creates church members with a simple call and response ...

That dialog that marks our baptism: You belong to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the response: I do.

That dialog that is for us table talk: This is my body for you, this is my blood for you, and the response: Amen. It truly is so.

That dialog, that exchange of confession and forgiveness where God won't allow anything to get between us, won't tolerate anything souring the relationship we have with God.

That spoken exchange of comfort and consolation as we share the promise of hope because Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again.

In this kind conversation – wherever and whenever it takes place -- we hear and recognize and respond to the voice of our Good Shepherd and God the Holy Spirit creates members of his church. It's as simple as hearing the good news of God's kingdom and saying – we want to share in that spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. It's as simple as hearing the good news of God's kingdom and saying, yes, with the help of God, I'm keeping on, following the shepherd, affirming the promises God made to me in my baptism. It's as simple as hearing the voice of the one who love you, who gave his life for you and saying yes, I love you too. It's knowing the voice of the one who has prepared a feast and now invites us to come into the fellowship of family and the rest of home.

God loves you. God has redeemed you by the death and resurrection of Jesus and has gathered you into his flock. In this flock God gives life, life in abundance, eternal life. Jesus gathers us in and leads us out in mission, in service so that through what we say, what we do and how we do it, people might hear the voice of the shepherd calling them out of death and into life. And that kind of powerful witness can happen whenever and wherever two friends get together and one says, "Listen to this ... God loves you and wants you to come in for dinner" in Jesus name. Amen.

## OUTLINE

Recognize a parents voice or not even a voice, a sound

Claims us.

Comforts us.

Provides and protects us.

Sends us.

Same for Jesus' people

When we talk church – we think local congregations

Denomination, clergy, liturgy, creeds and policies ...

We talk about church shopping; feeling at home

Really a matter of comfort and feeling, taste and style

But belonging to church – part of the whole of Jesus' flock

Is a matter of hearing and recognizing the master's voice.

Jesus says: "You are my sheep – I have ransomed you with my own body and blood."

And faith replies: "Yes, you Jesus are my shepherd."

That dialog – of baptism ... echoed by affirmation of faith.

That dialog – of supper ... this is my body for you, my blood for you ... response Amen. It is.

That dialog of confession met with absolution and the response –

I am forgiven, loved, set apart.

That dialog of comfort, the ways we bring the Gospel to each other

Hope of resurrection at the graveside

The work of feeding the hungry and working in hope for end of hunger

Sheltering the homeless

Keeping doors open and lights on

Speaking, always speaking, the good news of God's kingdom – wherever we are.

People will recognize, they will hear the voice, the sound of the shepherd calling.

Jesus is a gate – enter into God through him; Go out into the world through him.

Come in and go out with Jesus.

You gotta listen to this: That's how the God's kingdom is made known – person-to-person

Listen to this – You are loved, forgiven;

Listen to this – God is doing something new, and you're a of it.

Listen to this – God has opened the door to life and freedom.