

May 4, 2020
Fourth Sunday of Easter
“Voice Recognition” – Pastor Barnes

Text: John 10:1-10 Good Shepherd Sunday

Focus: He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought them out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Jesus knows you by name and calls to you. May God keep your hearts open to hear the love that calls and keeps you as you journey through this world.

Our world has greatly changed! TV remotes that we speak into that make channels change, lights dim and temperature in the house go up or down! Little boxes that sit around our houses that now have names...Alexa, what is the temperature outside? Cars that also hear our voice and change radio stations and of course, hands free telephone conversations, because, we don't want to be distracted!

“A I” that is artificial intelligence moves ahead at blinding speed, so now we no longer type, but talk to our computers...Is all of this good? I suppose only time and history will tell.

But, with all of these technological advances...voice is voice, but may not be heart or feelings or maybe even intention.

Owners of dogs, in particular, are very proud when their pet responds to their voice...even the sound of their voice. “Sit, Stay, Roll Over, Shake”...dogs can tell when their owner is upset, when happy, angry...and missing...There have been dogs who did not last long when their owner had passed from this world. Yes, dogs who have traveled almost impossible distances just to get back home.

I suppose sheep might have some of this. But understand this is only for metaphor!!! For we, who are SHEEP and are called by name...is also metaphor! To say Jesus knows you and you know Jesus. That said, it does mean we are known and know the one who calls. We are in relationship!

Think for a minute: Spouse or best friend or relative: What makes them happy? What is their favorite color? When is their birthday? Favorite things they like to do? Or unfavorite things? (you can make the list go on)

We sing: “Jesus loves me his I know!” For the Bible tells me so! This is not just a Sunday School favorite...this is a statement of relationship. This I know, we sing! The Bible tells me so, we sing!

Have you cultivated that intimate “name knowing” relationship with Jesus our Lord? It was said in Bible times that to know a name was to really know the person!

Our technology can give us tricks to trade for basic wants...but cannot teach us understanding of the person or love in relationship.

Besides the COV-19 virus that drives us inside and turns our insides upside down! We also have to deal with separation/aloneness. People talk about the “new normal.” What is that?

We scotch tape hearts to our windows. We clap for the frontline people. We hear new updates and statistics of where we as a people stand with this “thing.” But it hurts not to connect! It hurts not to give a hug or smile without a face mask!

I pray that this pandemic will soon be in the past. But I also pray that we will have a greater desire to reconnect and once again “know” the “voices” of each other.

Voice as Jesus the Good Shepherd CALLS to us out of love...so that our love for Jesus and each other will also be a bond stronger and more deeply understood. I was thinking...it says that the “sheep follow Jesus for they know his voice” A stranger they will not follow.

When I was growing up, I did not always heed the advice of my parents. NOW, I wish I had my parents around to ask advice! Friends sometimes offer advice about life or relationship...unfortunately, sometimes, we think we “know” better.

It takes maturity and openness to take into your heart and really weigh what is being said, rather than dismissing without regard. Isn't all of this true about Jesus our Good Shepherd?

If He is leading...then we are given the chance to “hear his voice” and follow. Trusting yet not always knowing where the path leads.

How often have all of us heard this statement: You are just not listening! Or If only you had been listening! (my favorite, when I young) Stephen, pay attention!

Why do we “tune” out so much? Probably because we think we know better or have already made up our minds. Alexa or whatever your “box” is named, does just what you say or ask! Sometimes, in relationships there is **more**.

It says in the Gospel: The sheep follow him (Jesus) because they know his voice. Know...means to listen. Listen means to care. Care means there is relationship.

We sing: He leadeth me O blessed thought! If you don't give it a thought...maybe you are unplugged like some computers?

I'm in front of people all the time...but the one thing I can't stand and I would swear doesn't sound like me...is my recorded voice. Oh, let me speak the word...but I do not want to hear my voice! I'll bet you have the same thought!

Does Jesus the Good Shepherd's voice sound strange to you? Have you heard it enough...worship, Bible Study, Devotions, Conversations with other people.

Oh, I know we are not talking about a certain tonality...We are talking about content and care and love. Don't use that tone of voice with me! I have heard on a few occasions.

Jesus tone is one of teaching. One of compassion. One of concern. One of calling you and me out when we have made our mistakes.

The underlying tone of voice is “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

AND “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” AND “Love one another, as I have loved you.” John 13:34

John 13 comes from the end of the final Passover. Verse 35 “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Isn't that my simple point: Do you and I truly know the voice of “love?”

Over my many years of ministry, when a congregation member goes in for surgery...I try to be there. If I cannot, I at least try to call. The same with those who are homebound.

Family members often say: “Just hearing your voice reassures us.” “We know things are going to be okay.” Wait! I said nothing of substance. I had no medical expertise or advice to offer. I was not there!

Yet the sound of my voice was enough. Humbling.

Many of you have had something like that occur between you and others and Jesus. And what is the response to Jesus' declaration of his identity as the shepherd who speaks to the sheep?

Gospel: “Those who heard Jesus use this analogy didn’t understand what he was saying.
Vs. 6

That’s not very reassuring to a preacher who is trying to use Jesus’ analogies to help you understand what he is saying!

Yet please note. Pastoral Jesus keeps talking. He loves his listeners enough not to leave them in their incomprehension.

He speaks. Even Peter after the Ascension, is asked by Jesus, three times....do you love me?

Jesus will keep asking you....do you love me?

As we begin to connect with his voice...then we will tend, care and feed his sheep.

So Jesus asked Peter and asks us.

There is no pandemic that can keep the promise of Jesus from you! There is no distance that can determine how much you are loved.

Know this...we shout Alleluia! He is Risen! And the Angels remind us that Jesus goes before us.

Keep your heart and hope strong, for there is nothing in all of creation that can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus!

Soon we will share that joyous voice with each other.

Amen.