

My Sheep Listen to My Voice

John 10:27-28

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

April 21, 2013 – Fourth Sunday of Easter



Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. “My sheep hear My voice,” says Jesus. “I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish – neither shall *anyone* snatch them out of My hand.” Throughout this 10th chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus takes the familiar Old Testament imagery of God as Shepherd, and applies it exclusively to Himself as the One who alone has come to shepherd the people of God – who, by Himself, leads, feeds, guards and guides His sheep throughout their earthly life. As the 23rd Psalm reminds us, He leads them beside still waters, feeds them in green pastures, and guards them from every evil of body and soul. Even as they walk through the valley of the shadow of death He guides them always in the paths of righteousness.

The sheep therefore – meaning you and I as Christians – are utterly dependent on this Shepherd for their very life and existence. Without the Shepherd, we would all be in big trouble. We’d graze only in dried-out areas where there’s not enough food to be found. We’d be alarmed and bewildered by all the things in this world which frighten us. We’d be easy prey for any and all predators. We’d be lost, unable to find our way. So we need the Shepherd – and most especially the voice of the Shepherd – to bring us out of barren places, comfort us when distressed, warn us of danger, and call us back when we wander. Without the clear, steady voice of the Shepherd, we sheep would be surely be lost forever. Luther puts it like this:

You are a lost sheep and you cannot, of yourself, find the way to the Shepherd. Unless {this} Shepherd sought and fetched you, you would simply fall prey to the wolf. But now He comes, seeks, finds, and brings you back to His flock through Word and Sacrament. He gives His life for yours, and keeps you henceforth in the right way {so} that you fall into no error. {From Him} you hear nothing about your own strength, good

works, and merit. Christ alone seeks, upholds, and leads you. He wins life for you through His death. He protects you so that you do not perish, and are not snatched out of His hand. You can do nothing but lend your ears, listen, and receive with gratitude this unspeakable treasure. You learn to recognize your Shepherd’s voice – and likewise to shun the voice of the stranger.

“My sheep,” says Jesus, “hear My voice.” In ancient times, there were often several flocks of sheep gathered together into one sheepfold for safekeeping throughout the night. In the morning the shepherds would come to retrieve their sheep, calling out to them. Yet each sheep knew only the voice of its own shepherd. They would ignore the other voices calling out to them as they zeroed in on their own shepherd’s voice. Only him would they hear and follow. “My sheep hear My voice,” Says Jesus, “and they follow Me.”

Unfortunately, however, there *are* many other voices in this world calling out to you. It’s the voice of our culture beckoning you to be one with all the others. To be sure, it’s often an appealing voice, for it speaks our native language – the language of the Old Man of Sin who lives inside us all. It appeals to your inner desires, needs and so-called rights. It calls out night and day from every quarter in which you find yourself. It chants the endless refrain that there is no such thing as truth, no such thing as right or wrong anymore. All that matters is what’s “true” and “feels right” to you. “Be spiritual,” it says, “but don’t get too involved with ‘organized’ religion.” “Make up your own mind,” it tells you, “and don’t let other people tell you what to believe.” This is the same seductive voice that once came slithering on a tree, whispering to our first parents, urging them to rebel against God. Don’t listen to this voice. This voice isn’t the voice of your Good Shepherd. It’s the voice of death and Satan.

The voice of your Shepherd has a clear, distinct tone ringing true as a bell as it calls you home. And yes, this voice also once came calling out from a tree – but it was a different kind of tree – the tree of the cross. This voice speaks of forgiveness and a love so amazing that the Father would abandon His own beloved Son to redeem a world which had rebelled against Him. This is a one-of-a-kind voice – the voice of God in the true, unmistakable words of Jesus. Here, dear Christian, here is your Shepherd. His is the one voice to which you should be listening. Jesus' voice speaks peace to troubled hearts, saying: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you." It speaks absolution to guilty consciences, saying: "Son, daughter, your sins are forgiven." It speaks new life into dead, dying sinners, as when it once said: "Lazarus, arise!" It speaks to you even now in the voice of the Gospel through the preaching of Christ's Word.

What a sweet sound it is! It gives a gift which can be found in no other place – the gift of eternal life – a life renewed, restored and given back to God – a life that's yours right now by faith. It's a grave-conquering life that lives forever, for Jesus' sheep will never perish nor die eternally. The life Jesus gives is a life with God that will never end. And this life He gives to His own as a free gift. There's nothing you can do to earn it, for there's nothing you could do that would be good enough to earn it. Thank God, it is all a gift, for while "the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

On the cross Jesus earned the right to give this gift because it was there where He took upon Himself the judgment due us sinners. There He took the death sin deserves and suffered it for us all. There the Good Shepherd laid down His own life for the life of His sheep. But now He has taken it up again. Now He has risen from the dead in testimony of His glorious victory over sin and death. Now Jesus can properly lead His flock into the promised land of heaven, because He alone is the One who knows the way. He's already been through that valley of the shadow of death, and

has come out on the other side to lead us to our heavenly home.

"My sheep hear My voice," says Jesus, "I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish – neither shall *anyone* snatch them out of My hand." Listen to this voice, dear Christian. Listen to this, your Shepherd's voice, and follow Him alone. This voice is the voice which gives life to the flock. In Baptism Jesus made you His sheep and brought you into the sheepfold of His Church. He taught you to recognize your Shepherd's voice – to know Him – and also to know that He knows you. He taught you this Word here in His Church where you first had it poured over you in Holy Baptism, heard it being preached into your ears, and ate and drank it the Sacrament of His body and blood given and shed for us sinners. This voice of the Shepherd in water, Word, bread and wine – this is your life – the life of Christ coming to you and carrying you into that life which is still yet to come fully to you on the Last Day. Listen to this voice and never stray from it, for your very life depends on it.

Dear Christian, your Shepherd is speaking to you again today. Will you not listen to His voice? Yes, of course you will. For you are like St. Peter who once said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." You see, this faith which God has wrought in your heart by the Holy Spirit working through the voice of the Shepherd, is a faith which hears, listens and responds. It opens your ears and puts a "yes" on your tongue. Your Shepherd calls, you listen, and you follow – for He is the One who gives eternal life – life which never ends. "My sheep hear My voice," says Jesus, "I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish – neither shall *anyone* snatch them out of My hand." Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.