

My Sheep Listen to My Voice

John 10:27-28

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

April 21, 2019 – Fourth Sunday of Easter



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. 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, our Lord Christ uses the familiar Old Testament imagery of God as Shepherd over all those who are His, and He applies that image to Himself exclusively as the Divine Shepherd sent from heaven who alone has come to shepherd the people of God – the people whom, by Himself, He leads, feeds, guards and guides throughout their earthly life. As the very familiar 23rd Psalm reminds us, Jesus, our Lord and Savior is the One – the only One – who 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 for His name’s sake.

The sheep therefore – meaning you and me as Christians – we are utterly dependent on this Shepherd for our very life, existence and subsistence. Without the Good Shepherd, we would all be in big trouble. We would undoubtedly be grazing only in those dried-out areas where there’s not enough food to be found. We would be alarmed and bewildered by all the many things in this world which would otherwise frighten us. We would find ourselves easy prey for any and all predators. We would be lost and entirely unable to find our way. Hence we need the Good Shepherd – and most especially the voice of the Good Shepherd – who alone is able to bring us out of barren places, comfort us when distressed, warn us of danger, and call us back to safety when we wander. Without the clear, steady voice of the Shepherd, we sheep would be surely be lost forever. Luther put 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.” “They hear My voice and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish – neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” In ancient times, it appears to be a common practice for shepherds to bond together and to place several flocks of sheep together into one sheepfold for safekeeping throughout the night. In the morning these same 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. Him only 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 us sheep. These are the voices of our culture beckoning you to be one with all the others out there. To be sure, these voices are often appealing, for they speak our native language – the language of the Old Man of Sin who lives inside us all. They appeal to our inner desires, our “needs” and so-called “rights.” They call out to us night and day from every quarter in which we find ourselves. They chant the endless refrain that there is no such thing as truth, and certainly no such thing as right or wrong anymore. All that matters is what’s “true” and “feels right” to you. “Be spiritual,” they say, “but don’t get too in-

volved with ‘organized’ religion.” “Make up your own mind,” they tell you, “and don’t let other people tell you what to believe.” These are the same seductive voices that once came as one voice slithering toward our first parents on a tree in the Garden, whispering to Adam and Eve, 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 that rings 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. It was the tree of the cross. It’s this voice which speaks of life, forgiveness and a love so amazing that the Father would abandon His own beloved Son to redeem this world which had rebelled against Him. This is a one-of-a-kind voice – the voice of the One True God in the unmistakable words of Jesus. Here, dear Christian, here is your Shepherd. His is the one voice to which alone 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!” and it speaks to you even now in the voice of the Gospel through the preaching of Christ’s Word.

What a sweet sound that voice 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. It was there where He took the death sin deserves and suffered it for us all. It was there the Good Shepherd laid down His own life for the life of His wayward sheep. But now He has taken His life up again. Now He has risen from the dead in testimony of His glorious victory over sin, death and the devil. Now Jesus

can properly lead His flock into the promised land of heaven, because He alone is the One who knows the way. He has 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 brought you this Word here in His Church where you first had it poured over you in the sin-cleansing water of Holy Baptism. It’s here where you heard His Word being preached into your ears. And it’s here where you ate and drank His Word in the Sacrament of His true body and blood given and shed for us sinners to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins. This voice of the Shepherd in water, Word, bread and wine – this is your very 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 this voice, for your life and well-being 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 listen to His voice. 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 because it is the faith of the Good Shepherd Himself. This faith 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.