

VOICES, VOICES, AND THE VOICE

J.j. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 57th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA
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John 10:1-10 1Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. 9I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (NRSV)

Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love. Amen.

Voices, voices, everywhere I go I hear voices!
When I was a practicing psychologist I could diagnose that condition.
It's called "auditory hallucination.

But today our Lord Jesus' diagnosis is:

Part 1 Listening to the Wrong Voices Leads Us Away from the Gate to Life

Which are those wrong voices? Answer:

Point 1. We Are Hearing the Voices of Thieves and Bandits

1Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 5They [the sheep] will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers."

Today more than ever there are plenty of voices of strangers.

The sheepfold here stands for the church, and the sheep are the people of God.

Everywhere we turn another voice is calling to us, offering us a gate to life.

These voices know we have been longing for life, real life, abundant life.

One says, "Here is the way to financial security. Of course you know how important it is to assure your future and the future of your family, don't you?"

This voice wants your money to play with.

Another says, "If you will only buy this product your life will be soooo much better. This is the door."

Here's a comic parody of such sellers: [**For Better or for Worse**, Sac'to **BEE**, 6.28.1998]

All kinds of other voices are now heard over the internet.

All these so-called social networks -- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, -- and on & on.

Voices of thieves and bandits multiply -- and the sheep & the lambs are listening, and some have followed strangers!

And that's because, **Point 2, We Want to Hear More**

Sheep have a hearing problem: We have eyelids, but no one has "ear lids."

The very fact that the sheep are listening to other voices spells trouble.

Considering other voices, other gates to "the good life," shows that we have a deep malady.

It shows a struggle in the heart of each one of us when we listen to voices other than that of the Good Shepherd. It's a question of trust.

Even those who have heard Jesus' voice over and over, will stop and listen to a new voice.

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Our Lord offers abundant life, but we tend to wish for a quicker, less strenuous way into the green pastures.

After all, that other voice doesn't sound like a thief, she seems very sincere.

He doesn't sound like a bandit -- he said on TV he's only concerned with our spiritual welfare, so send me some money. How can we turn down such offers? **We want to hear more.**

You've heard about SETI? S. E. T. I.? The Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence?

Fred Heeren, a science journalist, wrote an article titled "Home Alone in the Universe?" [FIRST THINGS, March 2002]

For 50+ years we've been listening for other voices from the blackness of space -- no radio signal yet from way, way out there.

Yes, there may be a legitimate scientific interest in seeing if there is other intelligence in the universe, but the symbolism of this search suggests a yearning for answers from some higher beings, a different shepherd.

Point 3. We Hear the The Voice of Judgement

In our own Lutheran Church we have reason to wonder if there are false prophets among us.

Critics of the ELCA, e.g., have pointed to an over-emphasis on the grace of God -- grace alone is certainly a Lutheran emphasis, but no Law? No judgement?

C.S. Lewis wrote in "Letters to Malcom," about '...the feebleness of all those watered versions of Christianity which leave out all the darkest elements and try to establish a religion of pure consolation.' [Emphasis added -- cited in For All the Saints, Vol III, pp.1123, 1124]

He further wrote, 'Bemused and besotted as we are, we still dimly know at heart that nothing which is at all times and in every way agreeable to us can have objective reality.' '...a safe god [small 'g'], a tame god, soon proclaims himself to any sound mind as a fantasy.'

Last, [The true God] 'comes not only to raise up but to cast down; to deny, to rebuke, to interrupt.'

Having listened to other voices and following false shepherds through other gates, it is little wonder that God, in his judgment, leaves us to our choices: to the emptiness of discovering the other voices all lied.

Hear the word of Isaiah the prophet:

A voice says, "Cry!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All flesh is grass,

and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

7The grass withers, the flower fades

when the breath of the LORD blows on it;

surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers, the flower fades,

but the word of our God will stand forever. [Isaiah 40:6b-8]

Point 1. We hear the voices of thieves and bandits, and, 2., we want to hear more, but, 3., we hear instead the voice of judgement.

But the prognosis is still good because of THE VOICE:

Part 2. The Voice of the Good Shepherd Leads Us Through the Gate to Life

Point 1, This Voice calls us through the gate of the cross.

2The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Voices, voices -- but this is THE VOICE, the Good Shepherd who calls us his own.

Now he calls us by name, the name given to us at the font of Baptism, and leads us.

He goes ahead of the sheep and leads the way, even though that way leads him to the cross.

That is why he came to earth as the Word, the LOGOS, a word that can also mean VOICE.

You recall that John begins his gospel with, "**In the beginning was the Word...**", the Word who was at the beginning of the world with God, the Word by whom all things were made, is also our Good Shepherd.

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John writes, **“All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” [Jn. 1:3a]**

When all was made at the very beginning of the world, God declared it to be very good.

King David, the Psalmist, underscored this when he wrote,

- 1** The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
- 2** Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
- 3** They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
- 4** Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world. **[Psalm 19]**

Our Creator left his signature in the world -- the heavens reveal the hand of a magnificent Designer.

But even though the heavens, day and night, reveal such a glorious Creator, yet a fallen human race, under judgement, needs a Shepherd to lead them to green pastures.

That is why, “...the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, ... full of grace and truth.” [Jn. 1:14]

He came to establish a secure sheepfold, the church, which sheepfold by extension also means our heavenly home, to lead us in and out and find pasture.

To establish such a secure place it cost him his life.

He said, **“...I lay down my life for the sheep.” [Jn. 10:15b]**

A life for a life -- his life for the life of the world -- a sacrifice once and for all, which means now:

Point 2, Our hearts are tuned to the Voice of the Good Shepherd

When he says in v. 10 of our text, **“ I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly,”** our hearts believe that he means each one of us.

We trust him when he says, **“Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep... Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” [vv. 7b, 9b]**

Our hearts are tuned to hear his voice, and so, v.4, **“...the sheep follow him because they know his voice.” [10:4b]**

We follow him from time into eternity.

Our Evangelist John is the John of the Apocalypse, who in his exile on the Isle of Patmos, wrote:

“Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.” [Rev. 14:13]

We know this voice from heaven. And that leads to the final

Point 3, We Become Voices that lead to the Good Shepherd.

We know what it's like to wonder if we can really hope to find the Gate which leads to life, and life abundantly.

So when we see another struggling to find her way, we can speak.

"Listen, do you hear Him? He knows your name. He is THE VOICE saying 'I am the gate.'

Take my hand, and we'll go together."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

S.D.g.

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