

Fourth Sunday of Easter - May 12, 2019, Year C
St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 10:22-30

"The Voice of the Good Shepherd"

Today in the Holy Gospel, Jesus is walking in the portico of Solomon, a covered walkway with pillars in the Temple in Jerusalem. It was a cold day, and it was the Feast of Dedication, also known as the Festival of Lights – we call it Chanukah. It was winter and that meant in Jerusalem there was a raw, cold wind coming in from the east. Did you know that it snows in Jerusalem? It even snows in Bethlehem because they are both on mountains. Jesus was walking in the part of the temple that was enclosed and it sheltered Him from that raw east wind. If you do a little bit of homework you can see where that was and just what that means. As He walked, prayed and meditated, a group of Jews came over to Him and asked, *"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."* (John 10:24) Jesus answered them, *"I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."* (John 10:25-27) Ouch! Jesus tells these Jews that He has told them over and over again who He is, but they will not believe. He speaks, but they do not hear. How many times have you said - "yes, honey" "uh huh. Yes honey", right? We agree and before we know it we are going to Hawaii! It is only because we are distracted because we are watching a game, or a TV show. "Yes, honey, what every you say honey." That can get us in a lot of trouble. We should be good listeners.

Jesus wants us to hear His words. Over and over again He speaks to us, and He wants us to understand who He is for our lives; He wants us to know and believe that He is our shepherd and we are His sheep. He wants us to follow His voice, He wants us to hear His words of peace and comfort for our lives. But you know what? Sometimes we have a difficult time hearing Him. We need to hear His voice and to follow it. Although we might have a difficult time hearing His voice, Jesus is reminding us that He wants us to be patient, and He wants to be patient with us, He wants a relationship of trust and understanding between us so that we can hear His voice, and we can trust in Him so that we will know that He wants what is best for us.

I think you will agree with me that we are surrounded by distractions in today's world. Maybe we hear what we want to hear and we tune out Jesus and tune in on all the sounds and words of the world as it rushes by. It might be a favorite song that we hear on the radio. Or it might be a speaker on the radio, and before you know it Jesus might be talking to us and we just don't listen. Maybe part of our problem is we don't take the time to build our relationship with Jesus and listen for Him to speak. Maybe we do all the talking and don't take the time to listen. How many of us when we pray – we do all of the talking? "God I need this; if you do this, please Lord, bless my family" all without taking the time to hear what HE has to say. Maybe the other part of the problem is we only listen to what we want to listen to, and far too much of our listening is centered on the world and not on Jesus. Think about it – have you ever tuned out someone who is talking to you because your mind is elsewhere? You answer yes, yes, and haven't heard a word they had to say. You are distracted right now – did you hear what I just

said?

The Jews heard, but they did not believe. They saw His signs, the miracle, but did not get the message. We have heard His words down through the centuries through the Bible, through preaching, through the sacrament, that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is the Messiah, the Risen Lord. We have seen His works of His Holy Spirit in the lives of many people, but still we don't really believe, do we? Some have a difficult time centering attention of our focus on this Shepherd who wants to guide our lives.

I want to suggest to you that we have an advantage over the Jews of Jesus' time, we have the whole story in the Gospels. We have seen in the scripture the witnesses to the Resurrection. In each of the last three Sundays, we have seen a powerful witness that without a doubt, Jesus has risen. So we should be able to trust in Him, to follow him, to believe in His Lordship for our lives with greater conviction than the Jews who came to Jesus that day in the Temple. Sadly,

- many still doubt,
- many still do not trust Jesus as their Savior.
- Many are still looking, still searching for meaning and purpose to their lives.
- Many have found no one to help them with the burdens they carry.
- Many are still wandering aimlessly in life, without any direction, with no goal, with absolutely no idea what to make of their life, and what they want to accomplish with the God given gifts that have been so generously given to them.

I think one reason so many people are aimless, or are just wandering around with no purpose - is because they have not let Jesus have control. I have said many, many time that Jesus is a gentleman who will never force Himself on anyone. He will not make you love Him; He will not make you obey Him. That has got to come from here – you have to open the door to your heart. You have to let Jesus in, and when you do that – you surrender to Him so that He can be their Good Shepherd; so that He can take care of you by giving you guidance, giving you peace, and giving you a sense of worth and direction.

How many of us can truly say that we take the time each day to listen to what Jesus has to say to us? Please be honest with yourself. Do you take some quiet time, sitting alone with your Bible or maybe you are listening to some Christian music, or maybe on a Sunday afternoon you are listening to Contemporary Christian Gold (shameless plug here ☺) or maybe you are just alone and listening for Him to speak to us through His Word? How many of us can say that? Sitting in that quiet place, listening for Him to talk to you? You might feel in your heart that He is speaking to you, that He is caring for you. Five minutes is a good start – you could do it with your coffee, sitting as relaxing before you gear up for the day. I promise you will feel a refreshment that is beyond compare, and a sense of direction as well.

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So let's talk about sheep. Sheep are not the brightest animals in the world, nor the best smelling. Sheep are a very valuable commodity because they provide wool, meat, and milk. We have a tradition, and many people have a tradition of having lamb on Easter Sunday. You can't get lamb around here! Not even lamb chops. We tried every butcher shop, but we understand that a new butcher shop that will be coming to town that might, just might do that. McKinnon Cattle that will be on 32 at the old Dollar General. I am very good at shameless plugs. 😊 They all naturally keep the flock of sheep together; they care for one another. That is why Jesus uses this analogy. But, when sheep feel threatened, they have one defense: they huddle together and run away. The only way a shepherd can get a sheep to go where he wants is for him to gently lead it along, walking ahead of them. You will never see a shepherd walk behind. They hear his voice. Eventually, the whole flock will come to know and recognize the shepherd's voice and words and will follow.

Just as a shepherd will search and search for any sheep that finds itself somehow separated from the flock until he finds it, so Jesus does for us. Our Good Shepherd pursues the lost people of the world, calling to them in the voice they recognize – or they should recognize. And when they respond to what they've heard by trusting in Jesus, He lovingly carries them to the flock, the Body of Christ, His Church—rejoicing all the way. Listen to the words that Jesus spoke to the critical Pharisees who complained that He was eating with tax collectors and sinners. In Luke 15:4-7 Jesus told them, *"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."* The sheep learn to trust and follow their leader who basically spends all his time with them, caring for them and protecting them. All the sheep need to do is listen.

Earlier in Chapter 10, verse 3-6 of John's Gospel, Jesus tells the Pharisees *"The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."* Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them."

Jesus went on to say, *"I am the good shepherd.* (this is one of the "I Am" statements in which Jesus reveals Himself as who He truly is) *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep*

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pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” (John 10:11-16) He is talking about the sheep in the nation of Israel, but He is also talking about us. We are the other sheep and we follow and listen to His voice.

Sheep respond to the voice and words that they recognize. Sheep will trust a shepherd they know. How comforting is that? If someone they don't know tries to herd them with words they don't understand, they will run away in fear. When they hear the voice and words they know, they respond in trust.

Just like sheep, we need to listen to our Shepherd who's voice we know and understand. There are millions of people around the world who have no access to the words of Jesus. Many have had little access to education and they cannot read. For generations, they have only communicated orally. Life revolves for them around the spoken word. Pray for these people to be able to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and that they might follow Him.

To be more clear – Jesus promises *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.”* And that is a promise that Jesus will keep, and you can count on it, and hear the voice of our Shepherd.