

“Which Voice”
Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 2:19-25;
John 10:1-10

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When you get a phone call and you hear the voice on the other end, my guess is that almost immediately you know whether it's somebody you know or not. Oftentimes, you will probably be able to tell who is calling you (if you haven't looked at your phone first to see). We know the voices of the people in our lives. We generally can tell who is calling us. We know those things. So as we hear this passage, it's like recognizing that we know somebody. Jesus is using sheep because they didn't have telephones back then, but the idea is the same. They know his voice.

What's interesting to me is how many voices there are in our world today. How do we hear Jesus' voice? How do we know that voice in the midst of all the rest of them? There are all kinds of ways we hear different voices. In some ways we're more connected to one another, hearing more voices than ever. Certainly, there's the news, there's social media, there's advertising. If we just take one of those—advertising—they're going to spend somewhere around \$207 billion on advertising this year. They are trying to get our attention.

There are these voices out there. Have you ever gone online to look something up? I went online to look up roofing materials not too long ago, then afterwards wherever I went, there were these ads popping up about roofing materials. It's like they know what I'm thinking sometimes. The point is there are these voices in our lives that are speaking into it. How do we decide what voice to listen to?

Jesus is inviting us to listen to his. But in the midst of all those voices, how do we hear his? Well, what does it take? What does it take to hear Jesus' voice? Maybe we should ask the question, why do we want to hear it? Why do we want to hear it? Those are the two questions I think we will juggle as we go through this conversation this morning: what does it take to hear Jesus' voice, and why do we want to hear it?

My sense is that all these voices that are trying to get us to hear them are trying because they want to lead us somewhere. Where do they want to lead us? Well, a lot of voices want to lead us to buy something or to take in a particular perspective for some reason. Oftentimes it is suggested that if we get a certain product or if we go a certain way, we will get more of what we deserve. We need to get what we deserve! I can buy a book that will tell me the 16 ways to negotiate better to get what I deserve. Or if I buy Product X it will make me a better person; it will give me the joy I want. Or perhaps I have to look out for Mayhem because he's out there wandering around, if you've seen the ad. So I have to worry about that fear that I have to try to overcome; how do I remain safe? And then, how do I be in control? That's why we all have smart phones is because they help us have better control of our lives, right? Although I sometimes wonder whether it works the other direction—it has more control over my life.

All these things are trying to take us someplace. What kind of message is it? Where does it take us? What is the purpose of all these companies putting all this money into advertising? Sometimes it's simply because they are competing to get their name out there so at least we will know who they are. But in the process they are associating themselves with these various themes. Generally, they are suggesting that our life will be better somehow.

Jesus says the ones who come in are thieves and bandits. If we're following a message that promises to take us to a better life but never does that, is it stealing something from us, taking something from us? Is it something we could have if we were going in the right direction? With all these voices asking us to go a particular direction, which ones are really taking us to new life, to a better life, to a more abundant life? Of course we have to think about that a little bit, but we'll get there.

So there's a promise. How do we learn about the promise? Well, oftentimes it is by going down a path and finding out it takes us to the wrong place. Many paths take us astray. The question is, do we believe Jesus as he offers to take us in the right direction, in a direction that is just and takes us to life abundant, and takes us to one who judges justly (1st Peter)? How do we do that? We have to get to know him.

If we're going to recognize a voice, we have to get to know the person who's on the other end of the line. We have to get to know him, and how do we get to know Jesus? How does he become the Good Shepherd for us? I don't know how to get to know somebody without spending time with them. To spend time and begin to learn who they are. How do we do that with Jesus? I think the most direct way is to read about his life, to listen to his stories, to hear what he has to say, to hear the whole story, and in doing that hear where he is taking us and wants to guide us, the gift he is giving us, the grace of God.

I believe that is the path to the abundant life. It's not a life full of more cars and electronics and stuff. It is an abundant life because he has care for our souls. He cares about who we are, how we live with each other, the relationships we have and share and the relationship we have with God. The abundant life is a life of righteousness. Righteousness is right and healthy relationships with one another.

As I think about this idea of following the Good Shepherd, it is because a good shepherd takes the sheep to where there is truly life and life-sustaining pastures. Really, isn't that what communion is about as well? It's a recognition that if we really want true sustenance, we come to God because God is the one who truly sustains our souls. Not only has God given us life, God sustains us. In Christ we recognize that the sustenance is also part of the journey—the journey into abundant life.

If we listen to 1st Peter, it's a little bit of a contradiction because he talks about suffering for what is right and good. Yet, the abundant life may include suffering for what is right and good because real abundance is when there's real love and relationship, when there is justice and righteousness.

You know, I feel like jumping up and down about this because I think that is wonderful. It doesn't happen a lot. It's hard to get there. But when you have those experiences where you recognize the right relationship you have with someone else, or the way justice has underpinned a group of people in a way that they get along and live together well, you know that that is the way, the good journey that's taking us into an everlasting life with a God who judges justly. Some people get excited about sports, but that's what excites me. It's exciting to think about a world that could be lived in right relationship and justice. A world where we could get along and care for each other and lift each other up. A world where all are fed and we gather around the table because we are people of God who know we are given the gift of life, the sustenance that we need, and a hope that we can continue to live into the grace and love of God.

It's wonderful image and a real possibility because it is God who is behind it. Jesus is going to lead us, if we follow him, into a good place. All those other voices? You might get something nice for a moment, but it's not everlasting. There's only one place to go for everlasting life. Amen.