

Sermon Easter 4 2019

May 12, 2019

John 10:22-30

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read, especially these words: “. **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.**”

Thanks be to God, today we have the joyful occasion to witness the confirmation of these two young men, something we've not had at Grace for, I believe, eight years. Of course, it's also Mother's Day, and if that wasn't enough, it's also Good Shepherd Sunday. Now this connection between Mother's Day and Good Shepherd Sunday is one that we can make quite appropriately. It's appropriate because in a sense mothers shepherd us in so many ways when we are young, right? They care for us. They love us. They nurture us. Sometimes, they even literally herd us. And as they do that, we come when they call because we know the voice of our mother as a child. As a child I could be in all the pain in the world, and to hear the voice of my mother would comfort me even in the midst of that pain. Of course something thought provoking that struck me this week, I don't know that I can recall the sound of my mom's voice. It's been over twenty years since she died. I can't still hear it in my head. I still remember things that she said, and am often reminded of her when I hear those things, but when it comes to the sound of her voice, if someone spoke exactly like her, I don't know if I would recognize it.

As I say this, I think we can draw a connection to the Gospel Lesson. In that lesson, we hear Jesus saying His sheep will hear his voice and He knows them and they follow him. Thinking of what I just said, what does this mean? It means we need to keep hearing that voice, don't we?

**My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.** So Christians, keep hearing that voice. Confirmants, keep hearing that voice. And we've talked over and over about this – where do we hear that voice? In the Scriptures, right? In the Bible? And where else? In the Divine Service, from me your pastor. Of course, as I always say, if you hear me say something that isn't consistent with that Scripture, or if you end up at another congregation, or with another pastor someday, make sure he's

speaking that voice of Jesus. Make sure he's speaking in line with what Jesus said. Hear that voice. Hear it in the words of Scripture, and hear it in the Service.

In fact, as I say that, we talked last week about how in a few minutes you'll be vowing to be in the service, to keep hearing that voice here, and I read a great, Gospel focused take on that, this week on my Facebook feed. It went like this: The pastor sees his member and says, "We missed you at worship the other day." The member responds, "I've only missed a couple of Sundays!" To which the pastor says, "I think you misunderstand my point." "Oh, I get your point...you're saying I gotta go to church." "Um...no. You get to be there, gathered into the presence of Jesus." The member says, "So, you're upset with me for skipping church?" The pastor: "No...I'm sad that you missed out on God's gifts." "So, You want me to feel guilt for not being there?" "No...I want for you to be there so Jesus can take all your guilt away!" "I've come 2 of the last 4 Sundays, isn't that enough?" "God doesn't measure His gifts by 'enough'. His blessings are unlimited and everlasting!" "So, just what is it that you want me to do?" "Um...stop focusing so much upon what 'you do', so you'll notice more of what God is doing for you on Sunday!" "So...you're saying I have to come to church this Sunday." "I'm saying... where would you rather be than with your Savior?"

Confirmands, where would you rather be? Christians, where would you rather be than with your Savior? Where would you rather be than hearing that voice of your Good Shepherd? Hear that voice. Hear that voice of Law, that voice which curbs you from a crazy life of utter manifest sinfulness, that shows you your sinfulness like a mirror, and that tells you how you as a Christian should live. And hear His voice in the Gospel telling you that no matter how grave your sin seems, no matter how much you have railed against this Jesus, this Shepherd, He still has paid for that sin. He has still laid down His life for you as that Good Shepherd. That blood shed on His cross, His crucifixion at the hands of sinful men, that's for you. Hear that voice.

And as I say that, this is becoming increasingly important. You see there are so many other voices that would seek to draw you away from this shepherd. Paul talks about that in the First Reading. You see here Paul was in Ephesus. He thought that the way things were going, he would never see the Ephesian elders again, that is the pastors in Ephesus. And so he gives them a warning: **"I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your**

**own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert.”**

Now to apply this most directly, this means I as the pastor here, as your pastor need to be alert. Paul was talking pastor to pastors here. But in that alertness, I need to alert you as well. You see there are so many other voices out there. We have YouTube Channels with voices, blogs with voices, Facebook posts with voices. You have voices in school, voices on TV, voices on the radio, even that voice in your head that tempts you.

What do they say? Well some of them speak like the serpent: “Did God really say? Did God really say that you’ll die in sin? Did He really say that your sin deserves hell?” Or in our day they like to soften this. “Would God actually send people to hell?” Or “Doesn’t Jesus love everyone, why would you say something is wrong?” “Or I think Jesus was just a really wise man and His followers made Him into this legend of being God in the flesh.” And they’ll make it sound wise, “I think Jesus told us how to love and is a good example, but I don’t think He’s really the only way to God. He’s a good teacher like Buddha or even Gandhi.”

Isn’t it interesting how these voices hear Jesus? Look at the parallel we can make with the Gospel Lesson. The Jews come up to Jesus and they say to Him, “**If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.**” They’re saying, “Jesus don’t be circumspect, speak freely and openly! Are you the Christ? Tell us!” And how does Jesus respond? “**I told you, and you do not believe.**” Isn’t it the same with these voices? Jesus has said it plainly, and yet these voices not from our Shepherd would love for us to look elsewhere than the Scripture.

They tell us this book is old and worthless. They tell us it’s an antiquated product of men. They tell us that we’ve advanced so much farther, and we’re so much smarter. But have we?

Confirmands, we’ve talked about that. We’ve talked about how we always, always underestimate the effects of the fall, and how as a part of that we think that because we’ve made our earthly lives more comfortable in so many ways, that since we’ve figured out how to create warm comfortable houses, or if need be cool comfortable houses, and how to create soft beds, and cars and planes to carry us around the world, and rockets to carry us to space, phones that are computers in our pockets, we think that since science has brought us to this point that it’s also brought

us to the great improvement beyond the words of Scripture; beyond this need for God, for our Shepherd. But what does He tell us? Well elsewhere, He says it so well: **“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”**

Sure it might look grand, it might make life better now, but is it really better without this Shepherd? Those voices, just like Jesus spoke openly then and they didn't believe, those voices—the devil, the world, and our sinful nature—they'd tell us not to believe. But hear His voice.

Finally, hear His voice and hear the promise: **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”**

As I finish addressing you this morning, Confirmands, and Christians altogether, hear that voice because of the beauty of the promise. In that hearing, you are in the hand of this Good Shepherd. Yes you might hear conflicting voices, you might experience the brokenness and the fallen-ness of this world in sin, that fallen-ness we so vastly underestimate. But as you hear the voice of your Shepherd, you know you are in His hand. And if you doubt it, hear that voice again, “I have baptized you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Hear it as you come to the rail today, “This is my body given for you for the forgiveness of your sins, this cup the New Testament in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.”

Know that, and that just as your mothers love you and care for you, just as you hear and know their voices, know all the more that this Shepherd of yours seeks to care for you and love you, and indeed, even forgive you, today and forevermore. Amen.