



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

For the last two weeks we have heard the stories of how Jesus came to the disciples after his resurrection. Doubting Thomas had to see Him to believe what his friends had told him about Jesus being alive. And then the disciples go back to the familiar, to fish. Jesus meets them on the beach and makes breakfast for them. The faith of the disciples was strengthened by seeing Jesus alive. They now knew that it was not a myth or a fairytale. Jesus had overcome death and was alive again for all time.

Our Gospel reading for today seems a bit out of place as it is a story about how Jesus is rejected by the Jews. It is before Jesus is put to death. It is winter, interesting comment. And the festival of the Dedication in Jerusalem, that we know today as Hanukah. The festival of lights that commemorates the rededication of the temple in 164 BCE. Jesus is there with the Jews gathered around him asking, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." They want to know for sure. They have to hear it from Jesus directly. They are looking for a yes or no answer. We cannot be sure if they really want to know so that they can worship and follow Jesus or are just looking for an excuse to get rid of him.

Well, we all know that Jesus is not a yes or no kind of guy, so he answers by saying that He has already told them. He reminds them of the work that he has done. And then, drum roll, Jesus says, "The Father and I are one." WOW Does this mean that Jesus is God. The Jews, no doubt, were quite confused by this statement.

Hearing this blasphemy, their minds are set on trapping Jesus, to back him into a corner, to gather evidence to use against Him, to eventually rid themselves of this so-called king or god, this good shepherd guy. They do not recognize Him for who He is. Because they are not his sheep. They do not hear when He says, "My sheep hear my voice".

Jesus' sheep hear his voice and follow. They see Him for who He is. The Son of God Almighty. But yet those Jews who questioned Jesus, even though they are in the temple, the dwelling place of God,

they do not hear Jesus' voice. Even though they celebrate the festival of lights they do not see Jesus as the light of the world. They do not know Him as their shepherd.

Today we do not have the backdrop of the temple. We do not celebrate the festival of Dedication or lights. So how do we hear His voice in our world today? Are we still doubting like Thomas? Do we angst over questions of why God allows bad things to happen to good people? Do we fall away because there is too much evil in the world that God does not seem to care about? Is God still in our world today?

I believe He is! So how do we find Him? How do we hear his voice? After all hearing is believing? Or is it following?

A quick story. There was a hobo walking down the street. He came up to the front door of a big farmhouse and knocked on the door until the owner answered. The hobo said, "Sir, could I please have something to eat? I haven't had a meal in days." The well-to do owner of the house said, "I have made my fortune in the world by never giving anything away for free. If you go around to the back of the house, you'll find a fresh gallon paint and a clean brush. Paint my porch and I'll give you a good meal."

The hobo headed off to the back of the house. About an hour later he knocked on the front door. The homeowner was surprised. "You're finished already? That was quick! Come on in and sit down and I'll have the cook bring you a meal." "Thank you, sir!" the hobo said. "I must tell you though, you really don't know your cars. That not a Porch back there. It's a BMW."

We all need to find God and listen for His presence in our lives. John's Gospel today talks about that relationship. So, listen carefully to the words again, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me." Jesus said, "I know them". Not they know me and follow me, but I know them. Our Savior and Shepherd knows us. He knows us inside and out. With all our quirks, our imperfections, and doubts. Our Savior loves us, and He comes for us. Just as he came to the upper room for the disciples, Thomas a second time, and at the beach breakfast.

We want to be close to Jesus. We need intimacy and want to be connected. Our need to be accepted, to be included and to know that we are loved for who we are is ultimate, a ultimate need for humans. Jesus is the only one who can give his unconditional love and He does this and then He makes a great promise. "No one will snatch them out of my hand."

Isn't that a great statement. I just love it. I am held tight in his arms, like a lamb. No one can snatch me away. Jesus is so strong as he holds me and loves me. Just like your mother used to do as she held you. You felt safe in her arms, protected, loved. And so today we say Happy Mother's Day as we give thanks for all the things our mother's or those who mothered us, did for us. There is just something about a mother's love for her offspring that is special. I have missed that in my life for the last 43 years since my mom went to see Jesus face to face. But a mother's love is not nearly as deep and full as that of Jesus' love for us.

His love runs deeper, because even if we try to ignore His voice and search elsewhere for that feeling of love, He does not stop loving us. God looks for us. God comes for us. God sent His only Son to die for us on the cross. He died a horrible death and then rose again from the grave to overcome death. No love can be greater than that. But if we do forget that we are His sheep, Jesus never forgets that He is our Shepherd. And if you ever feel like you are in a place where you are not

sure of that, just remember the words of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Certainly, powerful words to fall back on.

I know that I am speaking to the choir, so to speak, because we would not be here if we did not already know that we are one of Jesus' flock of sheep. We hear his voice. It is true that we did not come to listen for His voice because we were looking for greater meaning in the universe. We came to hear his voice because we were fortunate enough to have parents and grandparents, friends, and neighbors that loved us and wanted us to have the love of God in Christ Jesus. They brought us or invited us to Sunday school or VBS when we were young where we learned that we were Jesus' little lambs. I believe that Christianity is caught more than it is taught. And as I always say that I pray that the young people in Sunday school and confirmation here at CTS, even if they don't remember all or anything that they have learned, will at least remember how excited I was about Jesus, about Scripture and telling them about God's love. I hope that they catch the excitement of the faith from me. And the same for you. I hope that by coming to worship you will find excitement in the faith, from me, from the music, from hearing Scripture read and preached, and from each other. We are blessed to have this mighty congregation to encourage us in our walk of faith. But what about those who do not share our history?

Those souls who have not been taught and caught the faith have us to look too. We are to go out and tell everyone what Jesus has done for us. Yes, every single one of us. Invite people to church, to quilting, to come in and talk to me. And if you don't know how to invite someone, ask Scott Carpenter. He is about 5 lifetimes ahead of the curve of Lutherans inviting people to church.

But know that you cannot give the faith to someone else. We hear Jesus' voice, but we cannot hear for someone else. We have come to know the truth for ourselves. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We know He is the son of God because we have heard his voice. We come to know him and love him and believe his promise of everlasting life, forgiveness, and the abundant life here on earth. We come to know and love him because of what He has done for us. And even though we may not be able to answer the theological questions of doubt, yet we can hear his voice. And isn't it a shame that more people in the world today do not hear his voice? We need to tell them about what Jesus has done for us. We need to share our love with them so that too can come to hear God's voice.

I was very pleased this week as the new Pope was named. Not that he was an American, or from Chicago where whose Bears live, but rather that his first comment to the world was "Peace be with you all!", as he pledged to work for a united Church faithful to Jesus and to the Gospel. He has heard the voice of Jesus for a very long time, and I pray that he will inspire young and old to renew their faith in the one true God, so we can be church together in the world today. We very much need this unity of all who hear the voice of Jesus. For then nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And no one can snatch us out of his hands. AMEN