

Listen to the Voice of the Good Shepherd

- I. Because of who the Shepherd is
- II. Because of what the Shepherd gives

²²Then came the Festival of Dedication^[a] at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

²⁵Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, ²⁶but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all^[a]; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one."

Tell me, who are you listening to these days? Do you have a favorite podcast do you like to listen to? In light of the recent NFL draft, maybe you've spent a lot of time listening to Andy Herman on the Pack-a-Day podcast or Aaron Nagler on Cheesehead TV. Or maybe you enjoy spending time on social media. You want to know what people are saying on Twitter or Instagram or their Facebook posts. Or maybe you get your news from the news. The war in the Ukraine, plunging stock market, the rising cost of groceries, the arguments over Roe v. Wade. Or maybe the voices you're your hearing are the people at work griping about this, or complaining about that. Telling you how much better things would be if only this or that would happen. Or maybe the most powerful voice in your life is the one inside your head. The one that flip-flops between telling you that you are better than everyone else and telling you that you are absolutely good for nothing. The voice that has you worried about what's going to happen to you, what's going to happen to your children, what's going to happen to our country or our world. Sometimes the voices we listen to just end up bringing us down.

Which is why, today, God invites us to listen to a different voice. Here, in his word, God invites us to listen to the voice of someone who knows each one of us personally, someone who loves us unconditionally, someone who holds our future in his powerful yet loving hands. Today, on this Good Shepherd Sunday, God invites us to:

Listen to the Voice of the Good Shepherd

Why should we listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd? Two reasons:

- I. Listen, because of who the Shepherd is.
- II. Listen, because of what the Shepherd gives.

I think it's ironic that the words that God invites us to listen to were originally spoken to people who basically refused to listen to what the Good Shepherd had to say. John records the event with these words. *Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade.* This scene takes place late in Jesus' final year of his earthly ministry. He's in Jerusalem during the Feast of Dedication, which

is known today as the Festival of Hanukkah. And, as had already happened on a number of occasions, the Jewish religious leaders gather around Jesus and confront him with the words, *“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”*

You can almost hear the exasperation in Jesus’ voice when he answers, *“I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. (John 10:25-26)* In other words, Jesus knows that he had already made very clear statements about his identity as eternal Son of God and promised Savior. I mean, you think about when Jesus told the Jews, *“Before Abraham was, I am,”* and how the Jews then picked up stones to stone him because they knew he was claiming to be God. Or the time when Jesus clearly said about himself, *“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)*. And yet, in spite of what Jesus clearly said, in spite of the miracles that Jesus had performed to prove his identity as the Son of God and savior of the world – still the majority of the Jewish leaders refused to believe Jesus. The question is, why? Why didn’t they put their faith in Jesus?

Well, certainly one of the reasons why they rejected Jesus is because Jesus didn’t mesh with their idea what the Messiah was coming to do. They expected the Messiah to be a military hero. You know, throw off the Roman rule and make the Jews a great nation again. They were looking for Jesus to make sure they had plenty of food to eat. Remember how, after Jesus fed the 5000, the people wanted to make him a king by force? But when Jesus made it clear that he wasn’t that kind of “Bread King”, but instead declared that he was “The Bread of Life” and that whoever ate of him would live forever—well, that’s when a whole lot of the Jews said “No way. We don’t believe that.”

But here in our text, Jesus alludes to another reason that the Jews refused to believe in him. Jesus says, *“You do not believe because you are not my sheep.”* Now, don’t misunderstand what Jesus is saying there. Jesus is not teaching Double Predestination. He’s not saying that in eternity God chose some people to be his sheep and others he did not choose. He’s not saying that if God didn’t choose you to be one of his sheep, you will never be a believer, and therefore your unbelief is kind of God’s fault, not yours. No. Quite the opposite. Jesus is saying that the reason those Jews did not believe in him is that they stubbornly refused to simply listen to him. They refused to simply take him at his word. They refused to listen to what he said about himself.

But now, if you think about it, this whole scene of Jesus calling out the Jews for refusing to believe in him because he didn’t live up to their expectations of what the Messiah should do, presents a bit of a warning to you and me, doesn’t it? You think about how easy it is for us kind of come to God with our own ideas about what he should do. “Okay God, here’s what I need you to do. I’ve got this back pain that won’t go away. I need you to get rid of it. Or, God if you could just bring that special someone into my life, then I would be happy. God, you’ve got to help me get that new job. God, if only you would put this person in office, or bring about this change in our laws, or make sure those people get what’s coming to them, then I would know you’re for real. Then I would put my faith in you.”

Now don’t misunderstand. God certainly invites us to bring our requests to him in prayer. But let’s make sure that: number one, we aren’t doing all of the talking and none of the listening. And, number two, that we aren’t creating a God in the image that we want him to be, namely, a God who in essence is a Bread King, meeting all of our earthly desires, whether it be physical, financial or even political—all while we disregard the far more important spiritual and eternal gifts that God has won for us.

Isn't that the lesson the Bible teaches us in the account of Mary and Martha? Remember, Martha wanted Jesus to get her sister to help her to clean the house, while Mary sat listening at Jesus' feet. What was Jesus' response? Jesus told them both, "*Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her. (Luke 10:42)*" What Mary knew, and what Martha learned, is how critical it is for God's people to spend time listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Why is it so important to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd? Well, first of all, I. Because of who that Shepherd is. Here in our text, Jesus says that the Good Shepherd is not merely a really smart man or a great teacher with a lot of wisdom to share. No, the Good Shepherd is God himself. How does Jesus put it? *I and the Father are one.* The Greek word translated there as "one" doesn't refer to one person. The Father and the Son are not the same person. The Father is a different person from the Son. But they are the same essence. They are both one, in that they are both God. That means that Jesus the Son of God is just as powerful, just as holy, just as all-knowing as God the Father is.

Now, think about how that fact impacts Jesus' words, "*I know my sheep.*" That means that as true God, your Good Shepherd knows you better than anyone else in the world knows you. On the one hand, that is a great comfort. He also knows exactly what you've been going through this week. He knows what you're struggling with. What you're worried about. What you're stressing over. He knows and he cares. But he also knows how many times you've let him down. Times when you kind of thumbed your nose at him and did what you wanted to do rather than what he wanted you to do. Or to put it another way, times when you and I acted like dumb sheep. We refused to listen to his voice. Instead of running toward him, we ran the other way. And we ended up getting attacked by the Evil One.

And yet, in spite of our foolish and wandering ways, what has our Good Shepherd done for us? Jesus tells us. "*I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – and I lay down my life for the Sheep. (John 10:14)*" If you think about it, isn't that why we listen to our Good Shepherd? Because he laid down his life for us. He made the ultimate sacrifice for us to make us right in the eyes of God. It's his love for us that compels us to say with the prophet of old, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." Or in our case, "Speak, Good Shepherd, I, your blood bought sheep, am listening."

You might say, that's the first reason to listen to your Good Shepherd, namely, I. Because of who the Shepherd is. He's true God, who knows everything about you, and yet laid down his life to make you his own. Which brings us to the second reason for us to Listen to the Good Shepherd: Not only I. Because of who the Shepherd is, but also, II. Because of what the Shepherd gives.

How did Jesus put it? "*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life,*" When you think about all the different voices out there promising you everything from a slimmer waist line to a fuller head of hair, from a better night's sleep to a better game of golf—all of which deal only with life on this side of the grave, isn't it amazing to realize that we have a Shepherd who promises to give us a life that will never end, a life lived in the presence of God, a life of eternal happiness and joy, where there will be no tears, no sorrow, no death, no pain. How did St John describe what heaven would be like in our epistle lesson today? *The Lamb at the center of the throne will be (our) Shepherd; he will lead (us) to springs of living water. And God will wipe every tear from (our) eyes. (Revelation 7:4 17)* All as a free gift of God's grace for his children.

And yet, if you think about it, the eternal life that the shepherd gives is not merely the life

we will enjoy after we breathe our last. No, the life with God that lasts forever begins the moment God plants saving faith in our hearts. From the moment of our baptism, from the moment we hear our Shepherd's voice calling us to trust in him as our savior from sin—from that moment on, we are adopted into God's family. We become children of God and we begin to enjoy life in a personal relationship with God.

In fact, our Good Shepherd promises not only to give us eternal life, he promises to keep us safe in that state of grace until the day we die. How does Jesus put it here in our text? *"I give them (my sheep) eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."* (John 10:27-28)

Now, someone might read those words and say, "Wait a minute. Is Jesus saying that it's impossible for a believer to lose his or her faith? Is it true that, as some denominations put it, "once saved, always saved?" No. The fact is, as believers, you and I are always at risk of losing God's gift of saving faith. But if that happens, it won't be because of something God did or didn't do. It will only be because of something we do, or in this case, we don't do. Remember what St. Paul teaches us in Romans 10? He writes, *Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.* In other words, God uses his Word to create faith in human hearts. So, what's the one thing that can cause that faith to shrivel up and die? Not hearing the message! That is, not listening to the words of Jesus. Shutting our ears to the voice of our Good Shepherd. Pretending like we have more important things to do. More important voices to listen to.

My friends, with that warning, also comes a precious invitation from God. Let's face it. These days, there are a lot of voices we could be listening to, voices that so often only leave us feeling more anxious or afraid, bitter or angry. But fortunately, God offers us another voice to listen to, a voice that puts our hearts at peace. It's the voice of our Good Shepherd. The shepherd who knows you by name yet loves you still the same. The shepherd who holds you in his arms and will never let you go. God bless his precious sheep, the fathers and mothers, the sons and daughters who day after day, continue to listen with believing hearts to the voice of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Amen.