

## Resurrection's Voice

*John 10: 1-6, 11-20*

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them... “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.<sup>13</sup>The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes<sup>it</sup> it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Again the [religious institutional leaders] were divided because of these words. <sup>20</sup>Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?”

There are so many voices we listen to everyday. News anchors. Teachers. Podcasts. Preachers. How do we know which voices speak the truth and those which speak something else? “I am the good shepherd,” says Jesus. The sheep know my voice when they hear it.” Among all the voices we are told to listen to these days, how do we know which voice is actually his?

I have to be honest, in the past this text has not been my favorite. For one, if someone were to ask me what Jesus' voice sounds like, I wouldn't exactly know what to say other than, literally, he sounds middle eastern—which isn't a helpful answer at all. I mean, it's not a recognizable voice like Morgan Freemans' or Ellen DeGeneres. It's not a voice that has been seared into my memory like others have. The other day I overheard someone tell a friend, “God told me to just wait and be patient for a job.” I almost jumped in and said, “Great, could you please tell me what God's voice sounds like?” It is loud and audible and quiet and more of a feeling? Old or young? Does it sound like someone else's voice, or more like my own? Then, the metaphor Jesus uses of us being sheep doesn't do much for me. The metaphor has taken on a literal meaning, as if to say that we are Jesus' sheep, and as part of his flock we need to follow him blindly because, you know, that's what sheep do. Not to mention, whenever I have heard someone being called a sheep—especially these days—it hasn't been meant as a compliment. So what is Jesus saying?

To understand what Jesus means we have to remember who Jesus is speaking to when he says he is the good shepherd. You see, Jesus is addressing a group of religious institutional leaders who just ridiculed him for healing a blind man. They told the blind man that he was a sinner from his birth. That his condition had to be somebody's fault—either his own or his parents. Then when Jesus heals the man, these leaders call Jesus a sinner for healing him, and then they said that if anyone claims Jesus as the Messiah that person would be immediately excluded from their fold. In other words, we have a bunch of religious people saying that if you don't believe what we believe about who is a sinner and who is not, then you don't belong. Has anyone ever heard this voice before? You see, Jesus is responding to a group who, in the name of God, have excluded those like the blind man because their understanding of God is one that approves of exclusion.

So Jesus says, “No, no, no. The God you are following is a false representation—your God is much too small! God has nothing to do with death or sin or exclusion. I am the good shepherd who truly represents the God of the living. And all these people who are being excluded in the name of religion, they are God's children too, and they know the sound of love and grace when they hear it. And too often what we hear about God and Jesus has nothing to do with who God and Jesus actually are!

Well, we are witnessing a lot of people following a lot of different voices. Some offer thoughtful guidance, while others are like thieves whose intention is, as Jesus puts it, to, “steal, kill, and destroy.” And our discernment between these voices goes all the way back to the beginning in the garden with Adam and Eve. God's voice says, “Enjoy the garden, but just don't eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eating from that tree won't end well.” But then what happens? There is another voice saying, “Well, God didn't really mean “you'd die” literally! God just wants to control you. God doesn't want you to know everything God knows...” and we know how the story ends. Today is no different it seems. We are still caught between voices of life and others who are steeped in lies and destruction, including from political and religious leaders. And the scary thing is that whenever we speak to followers of these groups, they sound a lot like the leaders they are following. Why? Because the voice we listen to, becomes the voices that form our beliefs which then justify our actions. And it's the same story it has always been ever since the beginning.

Recently heard a group of old television preachers talking about the end of times—quoting the Book of Revelation, of course. “Jesus is coming,” one says, “Actually, Jesus want to come right now! Except, the Father isn't going to let Jesus come down yet, because people don't believe enough yet.” He continued, “But I'm willing to bet that if every single person listening today just sends in a check to the address on the screen as a sign of his coming, I have no doubt that God won't only allow Jesus come, but God will kick Jesus right out of heaven!” It is a funny example, except people believe it. They get hoodwinked with clever stories supported by random bible verses, and they believe it. It is tragically familiar and so they listen to the voices who, as Jesus puts it, “steal, kill, and destroy” all in the name of God

So back to the question: how do we know the good shepherd's voice? You see, there are voices which demand life, and then there are those which offer it. Which is what Jesus means when he says that he lays down his life for his sheep. He does not offer himself to make us feel guilty or

ashamed. He does not offer himself because a blood-lusting God needs an obedient servant, and a perfect offering to satisfy God's wrath. Absolutely not! Jesus does what he does as God's ultimate validation for how God truly feels about who we are. God would rather die than have us follow a God who justifies violence against others. And when listening to the good shepherd, we know the sound of love and grace when we hear it.

I'll never forget a story I heard during the peak of the pandemic. While hospitals were bursting at the seams, and ventilators were in shortage, there was a man in his 80's who insisted to his doctors to take him off his ventilator so a younger person could have a chance at a full life.

This is the kind of sacrifice Jesus is talking about. About a God who is so fond of us, that he lays down his life so we might experience a full life, filled with peace, forgiveness, and joy.

Some voices demand life, others offer it. Some demand obedience, while others set us free. Which is why your voice matters so much right now. So keep offering your amazing, grace-filled, light-beaming, full-of-compassion, life-affirming voices. Because God is not the God of death, but the God of life who is about validating all of God's children. And we know the sound of love and grace when we hear it.