

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
Mother's Day, May 12, 2019

One Journey Can Change Your Life: Follow a Familiar Voice

John 10:22-30

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

Jesus answered, "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. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

"The Voice!" The voices on The Voice TV program are often incredible.

But my guess is that they are not the most important voices that you will hear.

For example, when I was in high school, my oldest brother was serving overseas in the military. Since he couldn't come home and we couldn't afford the overseas telephone rates, we recorded our voices in Christmas greetings on a cassette tape.

About 15 years later, when we were all together for Christmas again, my brother brought out that cassette tape. Some of us were a little embarrassed as everyone heard what we had said as teenagers to our older brother. But then, as we listened, all of us started to cry. We heard a voice that we hadn't heard for years: the voice of our mother. She had died years earlier. Just to hear her voice again was the best Christmas gift that year.

To hear the familiar voice of your mother or your child on Mother's Day is a special gift. If you enjoy a good relationship, that familiar voice is the voice of someone who knows you and wants to protect you.

But today we are not only celebrating Mother's Day. We are also celebrating Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice." His voice, like the voice of our mothers, is the voice of one who knows us. His voice, like our mothers', is the voice of the one who protects us.

Moms, you know your children. You know their names. In fact, long before they were born, you were thinking of the perfect name for your little girl or little boy.

Isn't that true of the Good Shepherd? "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:14). He knew you by name. Isaiah 43:1 says, "I have called you by name. You are mine."

They say that there is nothing we would rather hear more than our own name. Like our moms knew our names before we were born, our Good Shepherd knew our names before the creation of the world. That's when he chose us to be his own.

Think of that! The One who created the universe knows your name.

But your moms also know your shame. Who of us hasn't squirmed a little when our moms told stories about the silly things we did when we were children?

The Good Shepherd knows your shame too. Psalm 139:1,4 says,

You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.

Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.

Isn't that frightening. He knows everything about you. He knows every word you have spoken. That's what Jesus said too. "I tell you that people will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36,37).

Think about your words. How many shameful words have you spoken? How many shameful words have you thought?

But look again at those verses from Psalm 139. Who knows you? Who knows your words? It is the LORD, that is LORD in ALL CAPS. It is the Savior God who knows every word that you have spoken.

That's why we start our worship services with a time of confession. We can try to hide our shame, but we can't hide it from the Good Shepherd. The only thing we can do is admit it. Because that is the key not only to our shame, but our fame as well.

What makes you famous in your mother's eyes?

It isn't what you did, but what she did for you. She was willing to risk her life for you. She was willing to suffer pain for you. You are famous in her eyes because you are hers.

Isn't that true of the Savior as well? He knows our fame. Our fame is not that we have done great things for God, but that he has done great things for us. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep.

Those of you moms who have little children, I appreciate your lack of sleep, your lack of personal time. But why do you lack sleep? Why do you lack personal time? Because the safety of your children is more important than your own comfort.

But as your children get older, it is harder and harder to protect them. You can't protect them from the pain of life. And so as your children grow older, you appreciate all the more the familiar voice of the Shepherd as the One who Protects his own.

“No one can snatch them out of my hand.”

What does that imply? That there are going to be people and things who try to snatch you out of God's hands.

Jesus is warning us that we are going to go through trouble. In fact, that is what John heard in the vision of Revelation 7. Who are those dressed in white? “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Jesus is promising that he can keep us safe even when Satan attacks. Think of how listening to his voice can protect you! When Satan is trying to make you give up in despair. The voice of the Shepherd says, “I know you.” When Satan is saying that you have done so many things wrong, God can't love you, the Shepherd says, “Come to me all you who are weary and heaven laden.” When Satan says that it all depends on you and the burden is crushing you and driving to drink or over eat or lose sleep, the Shepherd says, “It is ok if you fail. You are never a failure in my eyes. Your great worth is found in this. I died for you.”

Praise God, by listening to the familiar voice of the Shepherd, we are safe in his hands. He protects us in this time of great tribulation so that we can join in the great celebration.

I love the picture of Revelation 7:15-17. We shall be before the throne of God and serve him day and night and we will never be hungry or thirsty. No more tears. No more fears.

That is the imagery of the Ezekiel 34:25-31 reading as well. The people were experiencing the great tribulation of exile in Babylon because of their sins. But God promises them peace and safety in their own land, a foretaste of the celebration before God's throne.

Hearing my mom's voice for the first time in years also was a powerful reminder. Where she is, I am going too. I too will end up in a grave. In a tomb. I am so thankful that my mom and my dad prepared me for the journey to my tomb by first taking to the empty tomb of Jesus. They let me learn to recognize the Shepherd's voice by taking me to church and Sunday school every week, by praying with me and for me, by being involved in teaching those truths not just to me but to other people as well.

Our lives are a journey to our own tomb. But if I hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, I know this is a journey from one empty tomb to another empty tomb. My tomb will also be empty. “I give them eternal life.”

Brothers and sisters, sometimes it is hard to hear the Shepherd's voice. That's when it is so wonderful to hear someone else's voice who hears the Shepherd. Psalm 23 is a favorite for many. They are King David's words. But it is obvious that he has heard the voice of the Shepherd, and he invites us to listen closely to those words as well.

Let's read Psalm 23 together.

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk

through the darkest valley,^[a]

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

That's what my prayer is for every mom present today, every dad too. Listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd so faithfully that your children will hear the Shepherd's voice through you. Amen.

My Next Steps on the Journey From Jesus' Empty Tomb to My Own Empty Tomb

- **Listen to the voice of the One who loves you:** Memorize Psalm 23.
- **Listen to the voice of the One who knows you:** Read Psalm 139 several times this week, remembering that the One who knows everything about you (omniscient), is also always with you (omnipresent), and has the power to help you (omnipotent).
- **Listen to the voice of the One who protects you:** Post John 10:27-28 on your mirror or refrigerator to remember that you are safe in His hand.

GroupWork

1. Share with the group your most memorable Mother's Day experience.
2. What thoughts come to your mind (comforting or troubling) when you read Isaiah 49:15?
3. Read John 10:1-6. Compare the relationship of a shepherd and his sheep with Jesus' relationship with you. What is similar? What is different?
4. Read John 10:7-10. What lessons did Jesus want to teach us by calling himself the gate of the sheep?
5. Read John 10:11-18. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. What is remarkable in your mind about Jesus' role as your Good Shepherd?
6. Read John 10:22-30. Which of the following sentences most comforts you? Each person share why you chose the phrase you did.
 - a. "My sheep listen to my voice."
 - b. "I know them."
 - c. "I give them eternal life."
 - d. "No one will snatch them out of my hand."
 - e. "I and the Father are one."
7. Close by sharing names of individuals for whom you are requesting prayers. List those names below. Then joining in praying Psalm 23, the Good Shepherd Psalm, with these individuals in mind.