

## John 10:11-18

## Good Shepherd 4.22.18

It was over 10 years ago: I was waiting in the ferry line on Whidbey Island, with the kids asleep in the car after a day of hikes and adventures. The windows were rolled down, for the breeze off of the water to cool us down from sitting on the hot pavement, as we waited in line. As I sat there with the windows rolled down, listening to the breeze, I heard a voice. I sat up and started to look around at the other cars and their occupants. I kept hearing this voice talking. I knew this voice, but it had been almost 20 years since I had heard it. Could it really be who I thought I was hearing??? I finally located the voice, in the car just off to the back passenger's side of my car. I couldn't believe it! It was Ms. Amundson, my high school English honors teacher. Of course I wanted to go say hi right away; I was so excited to see – but more importantly to hear her voice! But I thought, of course she won't remember me, it was decades ago, and she's had thousands of students over her life time. But I got up the nerve, and got out of the car and walked towards her parked car in the ferry line up. As I approached, I started out with an apology: Hello, you probably don't remember me, but you were my English honors teacher in high school, my name is.....and before I could finish my sentence, she interrupted with an excited response: Well, hello Pam!! How are you!! Goodness, look at you!

I couldn't believe she remembered me! We talked until the ferry arrived. She had been out on the island with her grandson hiking and she had been retired now for a few years, life was good for her and she was happy.

But that voice....I knew my teacher and she knew me.

Jesus, is the Good Shepherd in our Gospel reading today. A shepherd who knows his own, and they know him....and will listen to his voice.

I bet, if I asked you to close your eyes right now, there is a voice of someone in your life, that if you heard it right now, not seeing them, you would still be able to know who it was. Maybe it's a teacher, a friend, a family member. Maybe you haven't seen in them in years, maybe they have died, or maybe you're sitting with them right now.

But you know that voice. Can you hear it now?

Jesus says, I know my own, and they know me....and they will listen to my voice.

Right before Jesus states he is the Good Shepherd in our Gospel reading, there is a blind man healed- he doesn't get to see Jesus the moment he is healed- for he's down at the river washing the mud out of his eyes. But when he does later come face to face with Christ, it is not by his sight that he recognizes him, but rather by his voice.

**A voice that is the source of healing.**

Directly after the passage of the Good Shepherd, we encounter Jesus' voice again. The story of Lazarus dead and laying in the tomb. Jesus arrives to the grieving scene and what does he do? His voice calls out- "Lazaraus- come out!" Jesus' voice calls by name his beloved friend and raises him from death.

**A voice that has the power to give life.**

And then remember that 1<sup>st</sup> Easter morning? Mary Magdelene was sobbing with distress at the loss of her Lord Jesus when the gardener approached. She begged at his feet with her face on the ground, without looking at him, asking him where the body had been taken. And then- she heard his voice. He called her by name. ....MARY...Her sadness became joy. She was restored with peace and comfort. She knew her Master's voice.

**A voice that brought hope.**

A friend shared a true story w/me about a sheep farmer that was devastated by the theft of all his sheep one night. He had loved those sheep: they weren't just farm animals to him. He had nurtured and cared for them. He had fed them and helped with the birthing and breeding. They were his flock- and now someone had stolen them...

A few weeks later while at a local fair, he spotted his sheep.

Now how does a farmer recognize his sheep from others- I don't know, but the curious thing is they recognized him. As soon as they heard his voice, they started baaing and crying for their true master. Although the thief had re-tagged/branded them: -it didn't change the fact that their true identity laid in the sound of their master's voice.

**A voice that searched, found and redeemed them as his own.**

We too know our Good Shepherd's voice.

- a. A voice that heals blindness,
- b. a voice that gives life,
- c. a voice that brings hope,
- d. a voice that always finds us,
- e. ....a voice that redeems us

**A voice that calls you and me by name, and claims us as his own.**

We have been branded and tagged and marked as the sheep of Christ in the waters of baptism and given new life....

We are fed and given new hope through a meal of forgiveness and love through the body and blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We are called to this table by our Good Shepherd's voice.

Jesus also shares in his story of the Good Shepherd though, that there are hired hands who fail, and wolves who prey. Jesus speaks of others who are not of this fold, but who he will gather into one flock.

I can't leave this part of the story unattended to. It's easier to not deal with those other characters of this story, but I feel I'd be doing a dis-service if I did not speak directly to them. They are there because they matter.

You see, the hired hands were being referenced as the religious leaders of the day, who would flee their duties of caring for the people when the Temple would be destroyed. They would run away from the Roman wolves who would scatter all of Israel.

But here is where the story can become hard to hear for our ears. What happens if we aren't just the cute innocent sheep we imagine being wrapped around Jesus' shoulders? What if sometimes we are the hired hands or the wolves?

What if we have been gifted responsibilities to care for God's flock, God's other sheep, and we run the other way from our responsibilities?

What if we are sometimes the wolves who say or do things which scatter the other sheep, because our actions do not follow the words we proclaim?

- ➔ The truth is, we have all been the hired hands at some point, failing our neighbors in not providing the care a good shepherd would.
- ➔ We have all been the wolves when our actions do not align with our words of grace, and our neighbors turn from the church disillusioned.

And yet.... we are the sheep too, .....

➔ sheep whom the Good shepherd knows all these things about, and still will come looking for us to gather us into one flock. The Good Shepherd calls us back, again and again....that voice which we all know so well. A voice which echoes in our ears, no matter how long we've been gone from its presence.

I know my own, and they know me....and they will listen to me.

The Good Shepherd sees us all as we are, in all our moments, and still calls and claims us in the baptismal waters, still calls us and welcomes us all to His table.

We are sheep in need of a shepherd. We stray and wander, even get scattered – sometimes more often than we care to admit. But our Good Shepherd continues to gather us together, guiding us, feeding us, and allowing us back out into the pastures of the world....sending us into the pastures to mingle and build relationships with the other sheep in the field. Being authentic and sharing the love of Our Good Shepherd with the other sheep, and inviting them back home with us....for the Good Shepherd will call us home....

The Good Shepherd knows us and we know him. May we listen and trust to his gathering call always. Amen.