

God's Voice
John 10:1-10

We are almost half way through the fifty day celebration of Easter. Why do we celebrate Easter for so long? The scriptures reveal to us that Jesus spent fifty days appearing to various groups and individuals before he ascended into heaven. Jesus used this time to teach people how to distinguish God's voice from all other voices. It's really not that difficult to identify someone by their voice. Think for a moment of what it sounds like to hear Bing Crosby sing *White Christmas*, Frank Sinatra sing *Strangers in the Night*, or Elvis Presley sing, *Jail House Rock*. We hear a few notes and know, without a doubt, to which these voices belong. The same is true in how we recognize God's voice. Identifying God's voice is generally the most difficult task for Christians.

In our passage today, John attempts to help us and the early Christians understand why we need to recognize God's voice. We begin by flashing back to Jesus in the temple. He has become angry with the Religious Leaders for allowing merchants into the Temple. After chasing the money changers out, Jesus leaves the temple and encounters a man who has been blind from birth. Jesus healed this blind man by smearing mud on his eyes and sending him to the pool at Siloam to wash his face.

In celebration of gaining sight for the first time, this former blind man ventured to the Temple to be cleansed so he could return to society purified and blessed. The Religious Leaders refuse to believe Jesus healed this man; but it was their opportunity to catch Jesus in a lie proving he could not be the Messiah. Now, according to John, the Religious Leaders excommunicated this former blind man because of his stance that he was healed by Jesus, the Messiah. When Jesus heard the news he searched for the former blind man to confirm that his words were true and there is another place he can find true acceptance and be blessed.

The problem with John is that he jumps to a mysterious metaphor to explain where this man's new home could be found. John begins his example with the story of the proper way to enter a sheep's pen. Quite a jump isn't it. Every night the shepherd either finds a three sided stone wall or builds (with bramble or thorny branches) a three sided pen. As the sheep enter the gate, they are carefully examined for any injuries from the day. It was not uncommon for many shepherds to build one pen mixing their flocks for the night. With several flocks together, the shepherds were able to take turns being the gatekeeper and protector for the night. This image was important to Jesus and John. It provided a concept through

which the listener and reader could visualize God's heavenly kingdom as the pen for all God's sheep to find comfort and protection. However, there was one huge problem. John records Jesus identifying the thieves and robbers who have broken into the pen for purposes other than experiencing God. These are the people who do not recognize Jesus' voice as the one who can and will provide for their needs. They have not had the experience of listening to God's voice. Who are these thieves and robbers? Jesus calls them church folks as he refers to the Pharisees and Religious Leaders. As church folk, are you able to hear God's voice?

Earlier I asked you to reflect on the sound of Bing Crosby singing "White Christmas", Frank Sinatra singing "Stranger in the Night", and Elvis Presley singing "Jail House Rock". How do you know these voices? The answer is simple; we have listened to them in concert, on the radio, and seen them on television for years. We have experienced the sound of their voice repeatedly throughout our lives. Isn't the same true with God? Many of us have grown up in the church learning the stories of Moses, Zacchaeus, and the Disciples; but did we learn the sound of God's voice? For John and Jesus, hearing the sound of God's voice is the only true entrance into God's flock and eternal life. The thieves and bandits for

Jesus are those who come to discount the miracles of Jesus and the power of God. These are the "Nay-Sayers" of the church. This former blind man was excommunicated from his family and friends because he proclaimed Jesus as his healer. Would he have been better off remaining blind? The blind man's experience opened his ears to hearing and putting an image with the sound.

The reader of John's Gospel is pulled into the reality of needing to recognize God's voice. One of the significant points to John's message occurred when the shepherds called for their sheep. With one special tone a shepherd could call only his flock. Jesus used this analogy to emphasize that when the time arrives for us to leave the safety of the pen (we call the church); we need to know the voice of our master. In biblical times the Jews believed the safe place was in their obedience to all the Jewish laws. These six hundred plus laws were created to clarify the original ten commandments God gave to Moses. Jesus realized the difficulty in fulfilling all these laws. He offered two simple commandments. "Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, mind, and soul and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus offered the security of trusting in God rather than laws as

our safe place. The people who followed John needed to decide which voice they would follow Jesus or the Pharisees?

Today we are also in need of deciding what voice to follow. The Great Shepherd is calling us to venture out into the world sharing our experiences of God's love, grace, and mercy. The tones we listen for are those that put our desires aside as we walk back into our community to serve God. For us today, recognizing God's voice is as simple as asking "Where is God when I package the meals on May 3rd for the 'Kids against Hunger' program?" "Where is God when I write another check over and above my pledge for the person who can't give to the general fund this week?" "Where is God when I talk with another person about today's sermon?" God's voice is found in what we receive when we give of ourselves. We hear God's special tones in our hearts when we feel gratified that we were able to help another person experience God. We know God's presence when we find peace in carrying out the "God Thing" (those things that can only happen because God was involved). These "God Things" occur so other souls can learn the uniqueness of God's voice.

God's voice becomes more familiar when we use our hearts, minds, and souls, to share God's love, grace, and mercy with the rest of the world.

There are many “God things” happening in our lives that give us the experience to learn the unique characteristics of God’s voice. Our challenge now is to leave the safety of our protected shelter and venture out into the world trusting in the leaders we call our shepherds. In our congregation today, the shepherds are the leaders of our committees and their teams. In the next few weeks they have been invited to hear your voice of what we need to be doing for God in our church and our community. Together with your help, God’s flock will continue to grow and others will begin to learn the sound of God’s voice. You are invited to join with us in the journey of following the voice of the Great Shepherd. This Great shepherd is leading us into new pastures where God will supply us with fresh food and water. Come, join God’s flock and hear God’s voice speak to you. Amen.