

SERMON: Hearing God's Voice
TEXT: John 10:11-18

4-25-21

Most of you know by now that my son is about to become a father in the next three weeks or so. He told me the other day that he's been reading stories to his son already by reading aloud while he and his wife are in bed. He's doing this so that the baby will recognize his father's voice the moment he's born. It's true that unborn babies can hear sounds in utero, possibly as early as sixteen weeks gestation. I know it will be a beautiful moment when my son speaks to his newborn for the first time and witnesses the recognition of his voice.

There might be one problem, though. My son also told me that he's reading the original Winnie the Pooh stories. Also a lovely thing. But when the story switches from narration into dialogue, he voices each character as he remembers them from the cartoons that he watched as a young child. He's quite good at doing impressions, especially imitating voices. So when reading Winnie the Pooh's part he really sounds like Sterling Holloway, who originally voiced Pooh. The same is true for Tigger and Piglet and Rabbit and Eeyore. So, my grandson might also be born very confused, perhaps thinking that his family resides in a book!

Seriously though, a father and son bond is already being formed. And I hope their relationship will continue to grow into greater closeness, with good knowledge and understanding of each other. I hope they will always be able to talk freely and listen well to one another.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus describes his own relationship with his Father. He calls himself the Good Shepherd, saying, “I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.”

With all the noise and all the voices around us, it can be really challenging to discern God’s voice, to recognize the Good Shepherd, and to follow in his paths.

There’s a wonderful story written by Christian pastor and author Max Lucado. It’s called *With You All the Way*. It’s marketed as a children’s book, but it has a deep and powerful message important for all of us.

The story is set in a time and place unspecified, and unfamiliar to us - a time of kings and knights and princesses. It begins with a prince in his kingdom, who

calls together his three most loyal knights. He tells them that the first one who can prove himself worthy will earn the honor of marrying the princess. The proof will come in the successful completion of a test. The knights will have to make a journey to the king's castle through a dark and deadly forest called Hemlock. Parts of the forest were so thick with trees that the sunlight never found the ground. Another danger was that the forest was home to a people called the Hopenots. They were small, sly creatures with yellow eyes. They were not strong, but they were clever.

One of the knights questioned how they would find the king's castle when the forest was so dark. The prince demonstrated, pulling out an ivory flute and playing a soft, sweet song. "My father's flute plays the same song," he explained. "He will play from the castle wall every day in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Follow his song and you will find the castle." Also, each warrior would be allowed one person to accompany him on the journey.

After many days and countless songs from the king's flute, a watchman in the castle tower spotted two figures stumbling out of the forest. The men had no horses, no weapons, and no armor. It was not the strongest knight, nor the swiftest,

but the wisest who survived the journey. His name was Cassidon. When the king greeted him at a banquet that evening, he asked Cassidon to tell how he survived. “The Hopenots were crafty,” he said. “They attacked, but we fought back. They took our horses, but we continued. What nearly destroyed us, though, was that they imitated.”

“They imitated?” asked the king. “Yes,” answered Cassidon. “Each time the song of your flute would enter the forest, a hundred flutes would begin to play. All around us we heard music – songs from every direction.”

“Then how did you hear my song?” questioned the king. “I chose the right companion,” Cassidon replied. At that moment, his fellow traveler entered the room. It was the prince, and in his hand he carried the flute. “I knew there was only one who could play your song exactly like you,” continued Cassidon. “There is no one else I would have trusted to be with me all the way. So I asked the prince to travel with me. As we journeyed, he played your song. I learned it so well that though a thousand false flutes tried to hide your music, I could hear your song above them all. It was with me all the way.”

Choosing Jesus to be our companion on the journey - reading his words, listening to his voice, following his song with every step - we will know him so well that we will recognize his voice above all others.

There's one other bit of this passage that I think we tend to gloss over, and that is when Jesus says, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice."

We often don't want to see, we don't want to acknowledge, we don't want to welcome those "other sheep." It's clear that they "do not belong to this fold." They look different. They speak a different language. They worship differently, if at all. But Jesus wants to - Jesus says he *must* - bring them also.

One week ago tonight a fire destroyed The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints here in Cape. This is commonly known as the Mormon Church. The fire was intentionally set. A suspect is charged with arson and a hate crime. But because we recognize the congregation as our neighbors and friends, we grieve with them and for them.

At the Women's Bible Study that met on Tuesday, this tragic event came up in our conversation. One woman suggested that we offer our sanctuary space for the Mormon Church to worship until they can rebuild. All the others in the room readily agreed.

So I sent an email to the Session later that day and they all agreed that we should reach out and welcome the Mormons. I have since made the offer, but have not yet heard back. Whether they accept the invitation or not, I am proud of Westminster and for putting words into actions. I am grateful to be a part of a congregation that so readily and wholeheartedly embodies Jesus with arms wide open to welcome and accept those who are not of our fold. I am thankful for the many ways in which you live out your faith.

You have demonstrated that you are HEARING GOD'S VOICE. You are listening carefully and consistently to the voice of Jesus in order to recognize it above all others. In obedience to the risen Jesus - the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep - you are loving God by loving your neighbor.

May we all continue to listen and to follow our Lord Jesus Christ... to the
glory of God!

AMEN.