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Apr

Knowing that Voice

Stories That Matter

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A

Like sheep, we learn to recognize the Shepherd's voice together. Worship this week focuses on discernment as a communal practice and listening for Christ's call to abundant life.

REFERENCES

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-34

Psalm 100

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

COLORS

White

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Great verse, one my very favorites. But what does it mean? Or in this case, how do we get it? What do we need to do to experience this abundant life?

We need to learn to listen. Okay, it is never as simple as that. That is only a part of our task. We need to not only listen but to follow. We need to not only listen but to trust. We need to not only listen but to hope. We need to not only listen ... well, you get the idea.

But for this week, we need to focus on our need to listen. Following, says Jesus in this passage, is a product of listening. He will lead, he tells us in verse four, but only after we've come out at the sound of his voice. He will lead, he tells us, if we choose to follow. And the only way we can follow is if we know that voice, if we can recognize the sound of it. It calls for a certain amount of

discernment. There are voices we need to run from—voices that don't have our welfare and safety in mind, voices that don't want us to prosper and grow, to know the joys of abundant life.

So, how do we know? How do we figure out which voice is his and which voice is the one that wishes us harm? Unfortunately, John doesn't help us out a whole lot in these verses. In part, it takes a lifetime of study and devotion. John Wesley called this lifetime process *sanctification*, the process of moving closer to Christ, becoming more like him. There is more involved than we can pull out of John, chapter ten.

But there are a couple of hints in these verses. First, the Shepherd knows our name. The call that comes from Christ matches us in the deepest essence of our being. He calls us to be who we are, not who we might think we want to be, or who the world tells us we need to be. Following Christ has a “rightness” about it. It is a response to the longings of our soul. And the more we follow, the more we are truly ourselves.

In verse nine, we are told that Christ is the way: “Whoever enters by me will be saved.” But then the text says we will come in and go out and find pasture. Come in and go out. There is a lot of movement in the Christian life. We don't just sit; we don't just find a safe corner and remain there. We don't lounge in place waiting to be fed. We find our sustenance in coming and going, in study and service, in spending time with the word and going out to share it. We are called to be coming and going throughout our lives.

If we feel as though we are pulled in too many directions, then we need to come back. Worship with the community of faith, study together the Word or books on Christian living or knowing, find places of fellowship for laughter and joy together. On the other hand, if we feel as though our faith isn't doing much and is all *head knowledge*, then we need to go—go and serve, go and help, volunteer in the community, do something with our hands, teach or share, help or heal. There are lots of opportunities for us to be going out in service to the world.

The odd thing is that it is both in the coming and in the going we learn to listen. We listen through the study and contemplation of the Word. But we also listen through the voices of need and hope in the people around us. And the more we listen, the more we come to recognize the voice of the Shepherd. A life of no regrets is a life lived in hearing distance of Jesus Christ.

Did you hear that voice?

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