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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 don't like being compared to sheep, which is quite unfortunate, because the Bible compares us to sheep all the time. I don't like that sheep are dirty and smelly, but more than anything, I don't like that they aren't smart. At least, that's what several camp leaders and preachers have told me over the years. But if sheep aren't very smart, how do they know their shepherd's voice? In some ways, that's the question for all of us this week. We, like sheep, don't always make smart decisions. We stray; we get trapped in ditches; we bleat and cry, waiting for the Shepherd to rescue us. But do we, like sheep, know our Shepherd's voice?

I have long thought that worship and discernment go hand in hand. We often talk about discernment as if it's purely an individual skill, something we learn and implement in our own lives, but not something we learn and practice together. But, like it or not, we're sheep (according to this week's scripture), and sheep practice discernment together. They know and follow the

Shepherd's voice together. Worship gives us opportunities to listen to, identify, and follow the Shepherd's voice as a community.

As you plan worship, consider how you can help your congregation learn to identify and follow Christ's voice individually and together. If the Shepherd provides abundant life, what does abundant life look like in your community? Where is it lacking? Is that a place where the Shepherd might be calling you to go? Pray for guidance to notice the paths of abundant life and give your congregation time to listen. Teach them the spiritual practice of being present and invite them to practice it as a response to the sermon. Share a simple song like "We Will Follow/Somlandela" (Worship & Song 3160) and encourage congregation members to sing it throughout the week to draw their attention toward God's voice. These are practices that our congregants may or may not be familiar with, but that we all need reminders to practice as we grow in the life of faith together.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement. Lisa is also the co-lead of Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God's Children.

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