

## Title: "Jesus our Shepherd"

Chris Ryan

John 10:3-5

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**Service Readings:** Acts 2:42-47, 1 Peter 2:19-25, John 10:1-10

*Jesus is our shepherd and we know his voice. What is behind the voice? And how do respond to it?*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

There is something beautiful, something unique about a voice from someone who loves you. Children, for example, can be on a playground full of peers when a voice calls out "son" or "daughter." All of the children hear it, but only one makes a connection to something much deeper, something much more intimate than the simple uniqueness of the voice. You see, for to all of the other children, it is nothing more than a distraction to what they happen to be focused on. They might even be familiar with that voice, if they happen to be friends with the child, but that voice will not be one that causes them to pause, to look up, and look upon the one who does the calling. But to the child who is loved by the one who calls, it is a voice that has the power to pierce through any preoccupation and reach his ears, regardless of how intently he may be focused. It is a voice that carries with it much more than simple words – it is a voice that wraps each and every one of those words in unconditional love before sending them out towards the child. For behind those words, behind that voice, is someone who has sacrificed sleepless nights to nurture him. Behind that voice is someone who has poured into him all they are so that he can grow and mature in all things that are good. And behind that voice is someone who will continue to give everything for the good of this child. You see, that voice is more than a sound that reaches his ears, it is a love that reaches his heart.

And the child knows this, instinctively, because his heart is tuned to the sound of this loved one's voice. He knows that wherever that voice is, there is safety, there is security, there is love. And as the child grows, he begins to mature in his understanding of this relationship and begins to appreciate more fully all that this person has done on his behalf. And so his appreciation deepens, not out of obedience, but out of love, out of response from the love that has been shown to him. He desires to know more about this person who has loved him, cared for him, and provided for him.

In our gospel passage today, John talks about the voice from the shepherd. He says:

<sup>3</sup>To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Just as the child knows the voice of the one who loves him, the sheep also know the voice of the one who loves them. And they follow him, not just because they are just familiar with his voice, not just because they have heard it their entire lives, but because of what stands behind that voice. It is a shepherd who has cared for, protected, and provided for them. The sheep and the shepherd's voice is a beautiful analogy but it only scratches at the surface of the richness of God's love. For to remain on the surface is to limit our understanding to the simpleness of the sheep. For the sheep know the shepherd, but only because of what they have directly experienced through him: safety, food, and shelter. They can attribute little more than that to the love they have for him. And so if we are to apply the analogy to ourselves and say that we know our shepherd's voice *only* by what we have directly experienced through him, we risk missing out on experiencing the depth and richness of the creator's love for each one of us. For beneath the surface of this entire passage is more than the sound of a his voice, and more than the sheep that follow him. What Jesus is proclaiming here is nothing short of the Gospel in all its depth. And what it is calling us to respond to is an invitation to pierce the simplicity of the analogy and begin to experience the full richness of God.

Jesus is our shepherd, this much is very true. And he leads us. And we follow. Yes. He is all this. But he is so much more. Jesus, our shepherd, *became a sheep*. He became a perfect sheep among the wolves of this world and against the wolves of the spiritual one. And he lived among his flock. And he lived like they lived – like we lived. He hungered. He thirsted. He felt happiness and joy, but he also felt pain and sorrow. He experienced it all, but in a way that kept this sheep perfect among the fold. And in this way, when the time was right, and with perfect obedience to the Father, this sheep offered himself up to be sacrificed. He went to the slaughter for us, *before us*, so that he could take from us an experience that he knew we wouldn't ever want. He went before us into death and he came out through his own resurrection so that we could experience not death, but life.

And in this way the sheep, who is also our shepherd, also became *the door* through which the sheep can experience all that God wishes us to experience. Jesus. Our shepherd. He who became that which we can enter into, through baptism.

And when we do, when we enter into his death and also into his resurrection – we share in the atonement that his sacrifice has brought and the victory over death that his resurrection proclaimed.

So, you can see how much we lose when we view this passage as little more than a shepherd's voice. To remain at this superficial level does not affect our salvation, but waters down our understanding of what Jesus has done. He is not a simple shepherd, and his is not a simple voice. It is much more comprehensive than that.

And so, the main question this morning is this: what do you hear when you hear his voice? Is it like the sheep that instinctively understands that there is someone there that cares for him, but who knows only his voice and little else about him? Is it like the child who has a much deeper understanding concerning what lies behind that voice, but whose understanding is still immature? Or is it something more?

You see, the question is really about how you respond when you hear his voice. Are you comfortable with just knowing what he sounds like? Is it enough to meet him weekly for an hour here in this place? To be baptized and regularly participate in communion? Is that enough voice for you? I repeat, this is not a question of your salvation – you can rest in the comfort of knowing that it does not depend upon you but only upon him. Your salvation is secure. This is a matter of the heart. It is about remaining where you are in your understanding of him. If you remain where you are, if you take no effort to continue to know your shepherd, you lose out on an opportunity to experience the full richness of God.

And so when Jesus calls us to follow him, the fullness of that calling is more than mechanics. It is a love letter to each one of us to know the God who has claimed us as his own, adopted us into his family, and calls us by name. And it is an invitation to continue to learn more about Jesus, our brother, who sacrificed himself out of love for us. Who entered into death so that we would not have to experience it. It is an invitation to make him the focal point of your daily life – to learn more about him through the Word. You see? This is more than a voice. *He* is more than a voice. He is life everlasting. How could you not want to know him more? Come. Learn about our shepherd. Don't just recognize his voice.

Let's pray.

Lord God, heavenly Father, in your fatherly goodness you have been mindful of us poor, miserable sinners and have given your beloved Son to be our Shepherd, not only to nourish us by his Word but also to defend us from sin, death and the devil. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us so that as our Shepherd knows us and provides for us in every affliction, we also may know him, and trusting in him, seek help and comfort in him, obey his voice with all our hearts and obtain eternal salvation; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever.

<https://acollectionofprayers.com/tag/good-shepherd/>