

Title: “Recognizing the Shepherd’s Voice”

Chris Ryan

John 10:1-10

4/26/2026

Service Readings: Acts 2:42–47; 1 Peter 2:19–25; John 10:1–10

Christ’s sheep live by learning to recognize the voice of the true Shepherd in a world filling with competing voices.

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.

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

“Beware of the voices out in the world.” That seems to be what Jesus is teaching in this passage. He’s speaking to those who already follow him, those who already know his voice. And so at first, this feels straightforward. We know how to recognize the obvious voices of the world: the voices of money, success, power, control. They call out to us, promising life if we follow. And yes, at times we do listen. At times we do follow. But often, by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit convicts us and we recognize those voices for what they are. We repent. We return to the shepherd. But here’s the problem: Those are not just the voices Jesus is really warning about when he says, “A stranger they will not follow.” Those voices are too obvious.

The more dangerous voice is the one that doesn’t sound like a stranger at all. The more dangerous voice is the one that sounds *right*, that sounds *reasonable*, that even sounds *religious*.

Here is the uncomfortable truth: it is not just that we sometimes follow strangers. It is that we often agree with them because they sound so much like us. The most dangerous false shepherd is not always out there in the world. Sometimes, it is the voice that is within us. The voice that tries to tell God what he should do, what we need him to be, what kind of life we ought to have.

And that voice can sound so convincing because it speaks in the first person. That sinful nature *always speaks in the first person*. It says things like “God, I love you and you are my shepherd. But I have this problem in my life and I really need you to fix it for me.” Or, “God, if you really loved me how could you let this happen?” Or maybe the voice is one of fear that Jesus has not really claimed you because of something in your life. Maybe the shepherd wants sheep who are less blemished. And so you call out *to yourself* to fix what is broken so he will finally call you by name.

And all these voices sound reasonable. But they are all attempts to shepherd God instead of being shepherded by him. These are the voices Jesus is concerned about because they are quiet voices that attempt to mix with his own in a way that you find easy to agree with. The voices know our most inner desires, our inner fears. And these voices so often lead us way from the cross.

This is what Jesus is teaching. The voice of the Good Shepherd never does that. It never leads us away from the cross. Instead, it leads us *to it*. *Always*.

Look at verse two where Jesus says, “[H]e who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the gatekeeper opens.” What door is he referring to, and who is the gatekeeper? Later he will call himself the door, but in this verse it is *he who is entering* by a door that is being opened by a gatekeeper. The door is his crucifixion and the gatekeeper is the Father. You see, the only way Jesus can become a door for us is by first going through the door of sacrifice. Our shepherd had to first walk through the door before he could be the voice we knew. In our Epistle, Peter describes it this way:

²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The shepherds voice, the pure and true one, not mixed with the voices of our sinful nature, *always* leads us to the cross. It is never a voice that says “do more” or “fix it” or “you don’t deserve it.” Instead, it is a voice that calls out, “It is finished. Your sins are forgiven. You are mine. I have done it all.” *This* is the voice, the *only* voice, that leads through the cross to the resurrection.

It is a voice that does not say “my sheep perfectly analyze my voice.” Nor does it say, “my sheep are responsible for discerning my voice.” The recognition of his voice doesn’t come from within ourselves, but from outside ourselves. It comes from where he has promised to speak: in the preached Word, in absolution, in the Lord’s Supper, in Baptism. It is here where the true voice comes, and it is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we recognize the voice as his.

And we can rest in knowing that it is not by our work that we discern his voice. Even when we are confused, even when we wander, even when we mix our own voice with his, we can rest in the comfort of knowing that the shepherd continues to speak. He continues to call us, to forgive us, and to bring us back.

When the voice we hear says “you need to take control.” Or “You don’t deserve it,” The shepherd’s voice says, “I have taken your sin. I have given you life. I have called you by name. You belong to me.”

It is a voice you will hear when your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You will hear it when his Word is preached into your ears. You will hear it when he places his own body and blood into your hands and says, “given and shed for you.” And in these moments there is no confusion, no competing voice. There is only the voice of the shepherd, calling you by name.

The voice that has already claimed you. The voice that has already forgiven you. The voice that has already passed through death and come out the other side for you. That is the voice of the true shepherd. That is the pure voice of *your* true shepherd. The shepherd who has given you life.

Please pray with me.

Gracious Shepherd, amid the many voices that call to us, quiet our hearts and fix our ears on Your voice alone. Lead us always to Your cross, where our sins are forgiven and our life is secure in You. Keep us in Your flock, and never let us stray from Your care. In Jesus’ name, Amen.