

Fourth Weekend of Easter (C/RCL)
Good Shepherd Weekend/Mother's Day: "The Shepherd's Voice"
John 10:22-30
May 11-12, 2019
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

"We have the light! We have the power!" That message in my mother Mimi's voice has been on our home answering machine since 2012. It was a couple weeks after Sandy when she called to let us know the electricity was restored to my parents' corner of Morris County. We saved that voice mail because the jubilation in her voice is spectacular. We've replayed the message countless times just to hear it and smile. Now that she's gone, it's all the more precious.

Do you ever think along those lines when the voice mail on your cell phone is full and it's time to delete messages? "Should I? Or will I **need** this voice mail to remember this person's voice once they're no longer leaving me messages?"

A loved one's voice is **so** precious. If you've been at the bedside of a loved one who is slipping away, you've probably heard hospital or hospice staff say, "Keep talking to her." "Keep speaking to him." Hearing is the sense we hold onto the longest. Those who can no longer **see** us can still **hear** us. Vision is a gift, but it isn't necessary for us to be in communion with one another. Doesn't talking on the phone teach us that? When we hear the person's voice, we're somehow transported into his or her presence. More and more of our family and friends are scattered, living in different states, maybe even different countries. Being with them in person is **best**, but hearing them over the phone is "the next best thing".

Our Lord Jesus says:

*“My sheep **hear my voice**. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.”*
(John 10:27-28)

We have this personal, personal, personal relationship with our Lord. Earlier in this 10th chapter of John’s Gospel Jesus says:

The gatekeeper opens the gate for [the shepherd of the sheep], and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run... because they do not know the voice of strangers.”
(John 10:2-5)

Sometimes, sadly, we **do** follow the “Stranger” with a couple S, though, don’t we?

The Stranger, the Deceiver, the Adversary, Satan, whatever you want to call him, may lie and tell us we’ll become like God if we eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Paradise, or may tell us the Good Shepherd isn’t **so** good that He’ll forgive **us** our sins, or that Jesus **is** the Savior, but doesn’t want to be **our** Savior. The Stranger with a capital S tempts us to worship something other than God, to trust worldly wealth over God’s grace, to seek solace in deadly substances or addictive behaviors instead of in Word & Sacrament and in the Good Shepherd’s care.

Jesus saw more clearly than we do that sometimes we run **away from** rather than **toward** Him. Shortly before He was arrested, tried, executed, He said:

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37, NRSV)

How often I’ve ached to embrace your children, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you wouldn’t let me. (The Message)

On Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, we’re so mindful of parents and grandparents: those whose hearts are rejoicing over the gift of children who are safe and healthy, whether they’re

biological, adopted or foster, and those whose hearts are breaking because their children are unsafe, unhealthy, at risk, unreachable, absent for whatever reason.

As the people of God we're called to do whatever is in our power to ensure a safe present and a hope-filled future for God's children. Our Father in heaven uses us to care for His family on earth, to advocate for the children who live in poverty everywhere, in refugee camps abroad, in internment camps in this country, in cars in this county. In last week's Gospel we heard the risen Lord tell Peter, "Feed my lambs, tend my sheep." That's up to us! St. Augustine put an interesting spin on that ball and raised the bar high when he paraphrased the Lord as saying, "Tend my sheep as **mine**, not **yours**." Care for **all** children as **God's** children, not as "welfare children" or "immigrant children" or "children of color" or any other adjective that diminishes them in any way. "Tend my sheep as **mine**, not **yours**."

Although we **do** have a lot of God-given power but we're obviously **not** all-powerful. Our children may fall by the wayside, at least for a time. We may as well. Some people seem lost, period. But we hope, regardless. Because we have a promise from our Lord, in today's Gospel:

*"My sheep **hear my voice**. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand."*
(John 10:27-28)

The Message paraphrase of that goes like this:

"My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them real and eternal life. They are protected from the Destroyer for good. No one can steal them out of my hand. The Father who has put them in my care is so much greater than the Destroyer and Thief. No one could ever get them away from him. I and the Father are one heart and mind." (John 10:27-30)

When Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd, He's dipping into Hebrew Scripture, including Psalm 23 which says:

*The Lord is my shepherd...
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil
For you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*
(Psalm 23:1, 4)

"We have the light! We have the power!" in more ways than one! The Light of the world is our Savior. The Father sent Him and He, in turn, has sent the power from on high, the Holy Spirit, who descended once upon disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem, and who has descended upon us, too, in Holy Baptism. We call that Spirit "Comforter" and "Life-giver." May God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, call **your** name and grant **you** grace to hear and recognize the Divine Voice, that **you** may follow in the path of Life. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham