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# THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

## DO YOU KNOW HIS VOICE?

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SERMON BY REV. STEVEN GRANT ■ APRIL 21, 2024

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Our reading from God's holy Word this morning comes from the Gospel of John. I will be reading selected verses from chapter 10.

“**T**ruly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <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.” <sup>6</sup> This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will

never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

John 10:1-6, 14-17, 27-28 (ESV)

A husband was very concerned that his wife might be losing her hearing so before he consulted a physician, he decided to do a little test of his own. He stood behind her across the room and said in a normal tone of voice, "Honey, can you hear me?" Nothing. Silence. So he moved halfway across the room, and again in a normal tone of voice said, "Honey, can you hear me?" Once again, nothing. So he moved up right next to her and very lovingly said, "Honey, can you hear me?" And his wife said, "For the third time, yes!"

Sometimes we fear that God does not hear us, at times it seems that He's not listening. First, I want to assure you that God always hears us. In fact, Jesus said that God even "*knows what we need before we ask Him*" (Matt 6:8). God is always there, and He hears us loud and clear—even before we speak. The problem is that we do not always hear Him, or at least we are not always listening. We might first ask ourselves if we would know His voice even if we hear it. What might prevent us from hearing His voice? Perhaps the main reason we do not hear His voice is because we are listening to the *wrong* voices. In our culture, we are bombarded with a wide variety of voices coming at us 24/7 from all different directions so we need to be careful about the voices to which we are listening .

As we read a moment ago in John 10:1-2, Jesus said,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep!"

Perhaps the first contributor to our hearing problem is the extent to which we desire to be our own sovereign. We are too busy

listening to our *own* voices and following our *own* agendas: "This is the way it has to be!" We have our own narrative: "That's just the way it is!" A significant problem with our current culture is the idolatry of *radical individualism*. This subject requires an entire presentation of its own so I will not get into it in depth but for now, it is enough to say that we live in a culture that says and affirms "It is all about *me!*" Our culture declares that human beings are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning of the end, the source of truth, or whatever it is that humanity claims to be the truth. It can be described as the "Kingdom of Self." It is when I am sovereign, and decide what happens, when it happens, with whom it happens, and who will participate. I will do my level best to get everyone else to be subject to my kingdom. I will even try to get God to be subject to my kingdom.

The problem is God is *not* subject to our kingdom, we are to be subject to *His!* In addition, other people are so busy trying to create their own "kingdoms of self" that they don't cooperate! All the "kingdoms of self" are constantly colliding. There are those who decide if God won't cooperate with their kingdom, perhaps they will just pretend that God doesn't exist!

The Apostle Paul had his finger on the pulse of his culture as well as ours when he wrote in Romans 1:25, "...*they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*" When we choose to serve and worship the creature rather than the Creator, we begin the downward spiral of our culture and the destruction of individual lives and relationships. When we listen to voices other than that of Jesus we get ourselves in trouble. Apostle Paul wrote these words to 2 Timothy 4:3, "*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...*"

The second detriment to our hearing and cause of our listening to other voices is that we are *not familiar* with His voice. In

John 10:3-5 he said,

“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.”

Have we really learned to recognize His voice over the multitude of other voices that we hear? How we improve our hearing and how we learn to recognize His voice is the extent to which we are familiar with His Word. That is why the pastoral staff of this church is always emphasizing the necessity of getting deep into the Word of God so you can learn to hear His voice over all others. God has revealed Himself through His Word. God has revealed Himself most perfectly in Jesus, the Word of God in the flesh. How do we know Jesus? How do we know what He said? How do we know what He taught? How do we know Him intimately? He is revealed and testified to in the Bible.

Something that Jesus said to His disciples still blows me away every time I think of it. All through the Old Testament, we are told that no one could look upon the face of God—even the big giants like Moses and Elijah never looked upon the face of God. As Exodus 33:20 says, “...*you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.*” To look upon the face of God would be too overwhelming. One could experience His presence or see Him from behind as He passed by, but no one could look upon His face. But Jesus said in John 14:9, “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*” Think about that. If the disciples looked at Jesus’ face they have seen God! If you want to recognize God’s voice, you must look into the face of Jesus and hear His voice. Often we do not see Him because we are looking for something else. We must compare whatever voice we hear to His words. Double-check in the Bible

to see if what you hear is based on the truth.

It has been said that Jesus plus anything equals a false gospel. Sometimes we are mistaken in what we hear. We think we hear Jesus' voice and then attribute things to Him that He never said or would have said. God does not contradict Himself. Many times throughout my years of ministry people have come to me and said, "God put this desire in my heart and soul and since I desire it so much, it must be right." Why do we assume that God put that desire there and it is not simply the sins of the flesh speaking? Why do we give Him credit, that just because we desire something it must be right? We learn to recognize His voice by how He has revealed Himself to us. There can be fear and confusion when we do not know how to hear His voice so when He speaks we don't recognize it.

I remember when I was a very little lad and on payday, Mom and Dad would take us all to a big store that was half grocery store and half department store, like a Super Target today only bigger. To a little kid, the aisles are cavernous with all the rows and rows of stuff stacked so high! And you know it only takes a couple of seconds for a little kid to wander off, right? So I did just that. I wandered off and turned a corner. Often when little kids turn corners and can't see Mom and Dad anymore, they stop and retrace their steps and once they see Mom again everything's fine. Well, I did that, except I think I took a wrong turn because suddenly I was in a totally different aisle.

I was completely lost and I was terrified, but I had enough sense to go to one of the adults in a company shirt with a little name tag. The next thing you knew I was standing by a huge counter and hearing my name and "Mr. and Mrs. Grant" over the loudspeaker. I was terrified and embarrassed...and then...I heard my mother talking. I hadn't seen her yet, but as soon as I heard my mother's voice I knew everything was going to be fine.

Immediately the fear left simply because I heard her voice. But it's hard to recognize a voice we haven't heard much in the past, we forget what it sounds like, and we haven't made a habit of searching for it. This leads us to the next limitation of our hearing.

John 10:6 says, *“This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.”* We often do not understand what He is saying even if we hear it. We get out of the habit or maybe never adopt the habit of talking with Him regularly. It is a problem, we have no active prayer life. Prayer is one of the most significant ways in which to improve our hearing and learn to recognize His voice. Prayer is one of the most significant ways to deepen our relationship with God. Like any relationship, there must be clear and regular communication. Think about a husband and wife who never talk to each other. What do you suppose is going to happen to their marriage? Will it have the opportunity to blossom and grow and remain strong? Instead, there are more opportunities for misunderstandings and for growing apart; one is not fully a part of the other's life. One does not know the other's heart. One party can't do all the talking.

The Apostle Paul exhorted us in addition to studying God's Word to pray without ceasing. Even if your whole life is defined by regular communication and a regular connection with the Father there are times when you do not feel like you are connected. That is when faith kicks in; talk to Him even if He seems far away. Many folks have come to me and said, “I don't know how to pray.” Really? You know how to talk, don't you? There is no magic formula to prayer. You don't need to sound like a pastor and try to be eloquent. The prayers that God loves best are authentic. Be completely honest with Him using your own words and your own ways of expression to share the things in your heart. When you make a habit of praying earnestly He will listen. You will experience the work He can do in your life, in your heart, and in your soul. You will learn to hear Him and to see His hand

working in your life and the lives of those around you. This is the spiritual reservoir you draw upon when things get difficult.

Perhaps this is a good time to be reminded of the very familiar poem called “The Difference” by Alan Grant.

I got up early one morning, and rushed right into the day;  
I had so much to accomplish, that I didn't have time to pray.  
Problems just tumbled about me, and heavier grew each task.  
“Why doesn't God help?” I wondered.  
He answered, “You didn't ask.”  
I wanted to see joy and beauty, but the day toiled on,  
    gray and bleak;  
I wondered why God didn't show me. He said,  
“But you didn't seek.”  
I tried to come into God's presence.  
I used all my keys at the lock.  
God gently and lovingly chided,  
“My child, you didn't knock.”  
I woke up early this morning, and paused before entering the day;  
I had so much to accomplish, that  
I had to take time to pray.

In verses 14 and 15 from our reading today, Jesus identifies Himself: *“I am the good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* I have observed through the years that despite what they proclaim many folks fall into the trap of not hearing Jesus' voice because they haven't learned to truly and completely trust Him. They say they do, but in practical day-to-day terms they have a tendency to trust others, professionals, and the things of this world—and they have their place. This is often demonstrated by the lack of patience in receiving God's answers. We pray and expect immediate results. I submit that God always answers prayers; however, He answers them in His own time, in His own way, and with His answer which is not necessarily the

one for which we were looking. We are not ready to hear it because we are waiting for the answer we *want*, not necessarily the one we *need* or the one He in His sovereign loving providence decrees.

There are times when God has planned and has every intention of granting whatever it is you are asking, but in His sovereignty, He knows that you are praying for item G on the list and He knows that BC DEF must happen first. It may have nothing to do with you. It comes back to asking whether you truly and completely trust Him in all circumstances. Jesus promised that He would be with us to the close of the age and I ask, do you really, honestly believe that? Not as a matter of creed that you proclaim, but in your daily living, do you honestly believe and live as if Jesus is with you every moment of every day, from all your joys and celebrations to open-heart surgery? Do you believe that He is in this room as we speak? Jesus promised that He would be with us until the close of the age.

John 10:15-17 continues,

...I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again."

The simple fact of the matter is God even goes looking for us. Do you think when He said, "*I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matt 28:20), that He would abandon you now? We heard the 23rd Psalm beautifully sung earlier by our choir, and we learned something of what shepherds do for the sheep. Let's think about that for a moment.

First of all, the shepherd *feeds* his sheep. God gives us His truth which is not just a truth or truth because some people say it



is or truth because human imagination makes it be, but *His* truth—the truth of salvation. Who do we talk to more than anyone else? Ourselves! We have a 24/7 conversation with ourselves so we'd better make sure that we are telling ourselves the truth! And where do we get that truth? Does truth originate with limited fallible people like us? Jesus said, "*I am...the truth*" (John 14:6), which means that there is such a thing as truth and it is discernible; it is Jesus! He is the truth. So, the first thing the shepherd does is feed us.

Second, the shepherd *guides* his sheep. As David said, He leads us to the places that are best for us—green pastures. In God's providence, we must have faith that there is purpose in everything that happens in our lives. We often don't believe that. We don't understand why this or that happened. But God, from His sovereign point of view, can see everything comprehensively and we can only see things in a very limited way. The great Shepherd sees all, He knows how it fits together, and He makes it happen. In the end, we discover, if we haven't already, that His way is always the best way.

Third, the shepherd *protects* his sheep. He stops us from wandering off. The Holy Spirit gets deep down in our souls and convicts and corrects us. We don't like to be told when something is not right in our life. We want to hear what *we* want to hear. But like parents who discipline a child that they love, or a teacher or coach who wants their student to grow to be better, or the supervisor who wants an employee to be successful, God puts us to the refiner's fire to become more like Christ for our benefit. The desires of the flesh prefer their own way which is the way of sin. Other voices have their own agendas, not necessarily with our best interests at heart.

Fourth, the shepherd *knows* his sheep. God knows you better than you know yourself. He knows everything about you. He knows your thoughts and He knows your hurts. He knows your

hopes and dreams. He is well aware of your accomplishments, and yes, your sins. And yet, He loves you anyway! Isn't that awesome? He knows what is best for your life. He knows how to make you become more in the likeness of Jesus.

Once again let's turn to Paul and some familiar passages from Romans 8:28-29:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

He is not saying all things *are* good, but that all things in His sovereign Providence *work* for good. And the best part is He foreknew and predestined that those called would be conformed to the image of His Son. He is saying that God can use all the experiences of our life, the good, the bad, and the ugly to help us become more like our Savior.

What is all this leading up to? I want to exhort you today to identify Jesus as the good Shepherd in all circumstances of life. **Trust** Jesus. He laid down His life for you. We remember John 10:17, *"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again."* He is not going to abandon you now. His death on the cross was no accident. Some modern theologians and preachers will tell you that the crucifixion should never have happened, that it was a miscarriage of justice, etc. They get a lot of mileage out of preaching about injustice. But the Bible teaches us it was the plan all along!

Remember Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Roman soldiers and the Temple guards came to arrest Jesus? What was Peter's natural response? He wanted to protect his friend so he pulled out his sword and attacked the servant of the high

priest. Jesus stopped him, told him to put away his sword, and then healed Malchus, the man struck. He said to Peter in Matthew 26:53-54, *“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”*<sup>54</sup> *But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”* (Earlier Jesus had prayed to God in verse 39, *“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will...”* and the answer was “No!”) He continues in verse 56, *“...all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”* The kingdom would not be built by violence but by sacrifice. This was supposed to happen.

Now think about it for a moment. This Jesus who was so willing to be arrested, humiliated, lied about, spat upon, flogged, mocked, and put up on that cross enduring unspeakable pain didn't die like others did on a cross. He was taking the sins and the punishment of every person on the planet. I can't even begin to conceive of how painful that was. And Jesus was willing to do that for you and me. As the good shepherd said, *“I know my sheep by name”*...fill in your name. Do you really think a Savior like that would abandon you now? He was willing to lay down His life and had the power and authority to take it up again. This promise of eternal life is for us all if we would but trust in Him. When we learn to hear His voice and follow Him that promise is assured.

The great Scottish pastor from the 17th century Richard Baxter once wrote, *“We are here together only a little while. We are almost at the world to come already, and therefore, it is time for us all to look about us and make sure that we are ready when God calls us.”*

Do you know His voice? Can you pick out His voice above the voices of all the others? John 10:27-28: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”*<sup>28</sup> *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”* ■



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