

Dear members and friends of St. John,

Jesus said, *"The sheep hear His voice, and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has brought out all His own, He goes before them, and **the sheep follow Him**, for they know **His voice**....I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 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."* (John 10:3-4, 14-16, ESV).

I often wonder how many people come to church on Saturday night, or Sunday morning, and **expect to hear Jesus speaking to them**? Not just the words of Jesus – no, I'm talking about the **very voice of Jesus**. I'm afraid that after a while we sit in church and wonder, *"What will the pastor say today? I wonder if I'm going to like the hymns that were selected? I hope there's some practical stuff in there that I can use, but it's usually just about God."*

Do we lose track of the importance of the **Voice** that calls out to us? Do we think about it as merely pithy advice, something that we may or may not be able to use during the week? Jesus says that He brings out His own, those that He has chosen. But where is He bringing them? To pasture land that provides nourishment, and to water that quenches our inner thirst.

Our souls are alive, but the condition of the soul varies from vibrant to near death. Why? Because only God can provide nourishment for and the water necessary to quench our souls. God knows our condition, even at birth: *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."* (Ps. 51:5). Every person comes into this world with a soul that is corrupted by sin. For most of us, we came into God's holy kingdom at Baptism, when the **voice of God** came with water to change our lowly hearts. God helped us to believe by speaking to us. But life after Baptism is too often a time where God rarely gets the chance to speak to us. Why? Because we ignore or refuse to listen to His **voice**.

Our Lord understands that the world, Satan, and our own sinful nature, will try to get us to listen to *anything* except the **voice of God**. We'll listen to TV talk show hosts, the neighbor or co-worker who loves to give advice, a self-help book that promises to give us what we'll need to be happy in life. Many will listen to a complete stranger before they will consider listening to God. So, worship is a time that God comes to us with **the voice of Jesus Christ**.

When we begin worship, we have the opportunity to confess our sins publicly. After confession comes the best news of all: The **voice of God** tells you that your sins are forgiven by Him in heaven. In a very real way, the voice of the pastor is the **voice of God**. The pastor is just God's instrument for speaking to us. People that don't know any better, often complain, "How can the pastor forgive sins? He's not God." The reality is that God is the **voice** that tells you your sins are forgiven. I'm only doing what I was commanded to do – to announce what God wants me to announce. It's **His voice!**

In the hymns, in the readings for the day, in the sermon, God speaks to us. His **voice** is there for you to receive. King David wrote in Psalm 23: *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."* By His **voice**, He leads us out to pasture, to a place where our souls can receive nourishment: the Gospel that proclaims that we have been restored to God by Jesus' saving work. By His **voice**, He leads us beside

still waters, where the soul that is parched by a world that is arid and devoid of God, can receive that which is necessary for life. Note that without the **voice of God leading us**, we would never find the green pastures and the still waters that are necessary for eternal life.

And after we have been fed and watered, we can be the instrument of God that leads others to the **Voice**. We are commanded to "*Go and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*" (Matthew 28:19-20). The **Voice** leads us in the correct direction – to others who are lost. And the lost hear the **Voice of God**, and one heart at a time is changed. One more life joins with us in the life-long process of listening to the **voice of the Good Shepherd**. May you never walk away from **Jesus' voice**. May you faithfully follow it forever. For that is God's desire for you.

Pastor Travis