

SERMON
+ Easter 4 C
May 11, 2025

Have you ever stopped
and just listened to the voices
that fill the air around you
at any given moment?

If you did, I suspect you'd discover that
your day is filled with a wide variety of voices.
Some matter to you, some don't.
Some make you react, some don't.
Some you trust, some you don't.
Some you obey, some you don't.

Sometimes they're voices of authority
and sometimes they sound very common.
A mother calls her child in for mealtime,
a teacher calls their students together to give an assignment.

A firefighter urgently calls out directions,
the doctor says, "You need to come in and see me,"

A lover says, "I love you",
or a daughter shouts, "Ouch!"
then begins to cry in the other room.

These are some of the voices that matter,
that make you react,
the voices you trust,
the ones you obey.

Jesus' voice is like that to his followers.
They know his voice, he says,
like a sheep recognizes and obeys
the voice of its shepherd.

I don't know it personally, but I've read
and heard stories from those who know

that say that it really happens that way.

A lead sheep – the one the other sheep follow –
hears the voice of the one who calls her by name
and comes immediately to the shepherd – actually runs –
and the other sheep follow right along.

In the Middle East in Jesus's day and to this day,
shepherds come together in one place
at night for protection,
at a large holding pen called a cote,
and they gather all their sheep into that one enclosure –
as many as 5000 sheep –
so the shepherds can get some rest
while they take turns keeping guard through the night.
(September 1993 in Homily Service, 34.2)

But when day breaks, so does that large flock.
Each shepherd has a call to gather their own sheep
and each shepherd knows their sheep
and the sheep know their shepherd.
And when they have divided again into their own flocks,
off they go into another day of grazing.

Just like that, Jesus says, his sheep hear his voice,
and he knows his sheep,
and they are all held in perfect security
because no one can snatch them out of his hand.

Out of the din of the variety of voices that fill our everyday lives,
Jesus calls us out
and he calls us here into his flock to hear his voice
and to be cared for and nurtured and held securely.

You know Jesus' voice!
You know it because you know what that voice says.
It's the voice that declares to you
the scripture readings for the day.
And the voice that proclaims to you the Word of God
and the gospel of our salvation in preaching.

It's the voice that declares,
"I forgive you all your sins."
or, "The body of Christ given for you;
The blood of Christ shed for you."

You know Jesus' voice
because it's the voice coming from the one standing with you
singing the good news of God in the hymns of the assembly,
reciting the words of the liturgy and prayers,
professing their faith.
or confessing their sins.
It's the one that declares to you,
"Peace be with you."

You know the voice of Jesus
because you've heard it
in the one who offers counsel and advice
or support and encouragement
or rejoicing and congratulations
or forgiveness and reconciliation.

You know the voice of Jesus
as the one who says "thank you"
as you fill their plate at the food line,
or sit with the new widow in her grief,
or open the door for the man with the walker.

Sometimes it's a voice of authority
and sometimes it's a very common, familiar voice to you.
But you know it's the voice of Jesus
even if you've never really thought about it in that way,
because Jesus' sheep hear his voice,
and he knows his sheep.
And they follow me, says Jesus.

But a funny thing happens here, doesn't it,
because it is our voices that sing and pray,
recite and rejoice,
declare and proclaim,

counsel and forgive and thank.
It's our voice that becomes for those around us
the voice of the shepherd.

Like Peter and Mary and Thomas,
and the whole host of those arrayed in white,
and the saints of God in every age –
like all of them,
we – who are witnesses to the good news of God in Jesus –
we become the voice of the shepherd to others.

We join Thomas in declaring, “My Lord and my God,”
and Mary saying, “I have seen the Lord,”
and Peter saying, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,”
and even Jesus saying, “Peace be with you.”

It all comes full circle:
the sheep become shepherds,
and the ones who hear his voice
become his voice for others.

These voices – your voices –
declaring praise and prayer,
proclamation and forgiveness –
these are the voices that matter
because these are the words that matter.

In a world filled with such incessant din
and desperate to hear the word that matters,
these are the words they can trust
and the voices they can obey
because, in the end,
these are not our voices and words,
but the voice and words of the Shepherd.

It's an amazing thing
that the shepherd who is one with the Father
calls us to be his sheep
so that we can share in the riches
of the Father, too.

And then, he calls us to become the shepherd to others
and the voice that proclaims the gospel to them.

That is the life-giving and relationship-restoring work
we have been called to.

It's a message that breaks through and matters.

May the words and work we do in his name
testify to our Good Shepherd
and bring his life to others.

Amen.