

*They will listen to my voice
John 10:11-21, Ps. 23*

Maybe you know the story of Alfred Nobel - it is a famous tale about a morning in the year 1888, when Alfred Nobel opened his morning newspaper to discover that he had died

It was an error, as it was his brother, Ludwig, who had suddenly died and the newspapers got it wrong. But even more shocking than reading you had died was what the editors said about you.

The newspapers called him a merchant of death because he was the inventor of dynamite. And his discoveries had led to finding ways to kill more people faster than ever.

Alfred Nobel did not like what he read about himself in his own obituary, and so he decided in the time left to him to change his legacy.

He wanted to be remembered as someone who championed the advance of science, but also of peace

As part of his will he left a great deal of his vast fortune to found the Nobel Prizes in

- Medicine, Chemistry, Economics
- Literature and, of course, Peace.

Now hardly anyone remembers that he perfected dynamite, but millions know about the prizes, and they are highly valued, and as certain people in Washington found out, very hard to win.

The season of Easter is about new beginnings, looking for hopeful signs, new birth.

In the imagery of today's passage, the way of Jesus Christ is a straight path, but we often wander off into the weeds.

And like sheep we sometimes run, sometimes meander, sometimes munch our way off the narrow road that is the way of Jesus Christ

And so, Jesus calls us his flock, with sheep that have often gone astray with this wonderful imagery, metaphor, "I Am" saying. "I am the good Shepherd"

He calls himself the good shepherd who protects, guides and lays down his life for his flock

Now, if we are going to stay on that straight and narrow path that is the way of Jesus Christ that leads to the kingdom of God where peace and joy are found in plenty, where new life is found, we can learn some spiritual lessons from this gentle protector and guide.

1 Admit

We need to start by admitting that by ourselves, we cannot achieve the abundant spiritual life which God wants us to have. Jesus says in the very first Beatitude in Matthew, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for their's is the kingdom of heaven. IN other words, how happy are you when you know your need, even when you fail, because you know you need God's Spirit, the kingdom of heaven is yours.

Sometimes our independence can be a stumbling block for spiritual growth. If we are so self-sufficient and proud we can have a hard time admitting we need God at all. If you take this imagery of Jesus saying "I am the Good Shepherd" a little further, it means we, like a lone sheep, are not advised to take things on all by ourselves.

The truth is, we need help to stay on the straight and narrow - we need a good shepherd. And that's the 1st and most important spiritual lesson we need to learn.

In technical terms we need to learn this spiritual idea of Repentance. It starts with admitting we've wandered off into the weeds and bleating for help. Then, by the grace of God, we need to stop and do a U-turn back toward the way of Jesus Christ.

And since wandering off the way of Jesus can also mean hurting ourselves and others, we need to ask for forgiveness so that old hurtful stuff can be cleared away and a path to new life is opened up.

We need a good shepherd to help us out with all this...It's about getting back on the road to peace and joy, and above all, love of God and others.

It's about finding yourself by losing yourself in God and following the good shepherd.

It's what John the Baptist said was necessary to find the kingdom of God.

Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand! he beseeched the people

Which roughly translated means,

You're going to miss the way to the kingdom of God if you don't turn around.

The first word is to admit - we need a good shepherd so that we can stay on and get back on the straight and narrow way of Jesus Christ.

2 Remember

A. The 2nd spiritual lesson that is essential to the way of Jesus Christ is to remember that Jesus, the good shepherd, will come for us no matter how far we've strayed. Not only that, he will come for us, no matter how big and ugly the powers arrayed against us.

The most beloved image of the Good Shepherd is probably found in Psalm 23. And in the Gospel of John, Jesus contrasts that image with the image of a hired hand.

In Psalm. 23, the sheep are not afraid for they are protected from predators by the shepherd's rod and staff

In contrast, Jesus says the hired hand will run to protect himself and leave the sheep to deal with the wolf however they can.

Why? Because the hired hand does not love the sheep, but the shepherd does.

It seems strange to say that a shepherd loves his sheep, but think about it. In Palestine, sheep were kept primarily for their wool, not their meat.

Therefore, the shepherd helped birth the lambs and knew them all their lives. He tended them when their skin was torn by brambles and thorns by rubbing oil and ointment on them

Or as Ps. 23 says, *you anointed my head with oil* - referring to a ritual but also the ministrations of the shepherd to the sheep

And he fought off wolves, lions and bears and sometimes was killed as he protected the flock.

So, when tough times corner us like a hungry wolf or maul us like a bear,...

Remember that Jesus, the good shepherd, will come to stand with you and heal you

3 COMMIT

Jesus tells us a bit further about the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. Sheep, like most animals, are not used to human beings and naturally run from them.

Except for their shepherd - they know his voice and his history of care for them. And so when they hear him, they run to him because he is trusted.

So John 10:16 is an interesting verse. "his own will know his voice, and they will listen." Passages in the Bible sometimes use the words "hearing" and "listening" as one in the same.

But, as Jesus said elsewhere, Let those with ears to hear - listen. I think he means just having ears attached to our heads is not enough. To actually Listen means an active response - an attentiveness, a commitment to do what the speaking person said to do. Listening is not the same as hearing, as anyone who has ever trained a puppy would agree.

When you hear the sound of the Master's voice - do you come running, trusting in him and his mission?

He says whenever we feed the hungry and house the homeless...

Whenever you and I welcome the foreigner and stranger and visit those imprisoned.

Whenever we do it to the least of these - we do it for Jesus himself.

So when we hear the cry of the hungry, the refugee, the stranger in our land, the imprisoned.. We are hearing the voice of Jesus, but are we listening?

When we care for creation, we are not just hearing the master's voice, we are listening.

When we fight against gun violence, we are not just hearing Jesus, but we are listening.

When we bring food on the first Sunday of the month to share, we are not just hearing the masters voice, we are listening

When we forgive someone who is difficult, we are not just hearing the masters voice, we are listening.

When we love one another as Jesus loves us, we are not just hearing the voice of the shepherd, we are listening.

Do we come trust him and respond when he calls us?

When the Spirit moves within us & draws us to worship, bible study, or prayer, do we come running?

Jesus is calling to us all the time, do we trust him and come running to him?

I like the story of the Navajo native American walking down a crowded city street with his friend. It was near the noon hour and there was noise and cars and honking of cabs. The Navajo

said, "I hear a cricket!" His friend said, "what how could you hear anything in this chaos?"

The Navajo walked over to a planter where some shrubs were growing and sure enough he found a cricket..

His friend said, "You must have super sensitive ears."

The native American said, 'well it depends what your ears are listening for." He said - "its like this -watch" - and the Navajo took a bunch of coins out of his pocket and dropped them on the sidewalk. Everyone within 20 feet immediately turned around to see if they had dropped something.

"See what I mean?" he said. "It all depends what you are listening for."

In this time of rebirth, is it time to believe and remember Jesus is with us and for us and not despair that our problems are too big, or that we are still dealing with this crisis of COVID-19, and climate change and gun violence, and it seems overwhelming.

The triune God calls us to stay close to the Shepherd. He sends out the good shepherd to save us from evil and guide us in the right way.

Where they will listen to my voice.

May it be so for us all.

Thanks be to God.