

Fourth Sunday of Easter
"Listening to the Shepherd's Voice"

One of my favorite people is a priest I used to know, whose name was Tom Munn. You would have liked Tom too. If you can picture a mischievous Catholic priest, that was Tom.

One thing he like to do was to play practical jokes like the day he dressed up as a homeless begger, and knocked on the door of the Lutheran parsonage to welcome the new pastor to town. Other another time he made another pastor's car keys disappear.

One of my favorite things about Tom Munn, was that he was always quick with one-liners. When the Missouri Synod Lutheran pastor in town announced that he had taken another call, we had a going away dinner for him over at our house. So sitting right across the table from each other was this Missouri Synod Lutheran pastor and this Catholic priest, and both of them had a great sense of humor. You should have heard the Lutheran and Catholic jokes that flew across the table that night.

Tom was also the one who first taught me what it means to have a "Sr. moment."

He was famous for forgetting things. But that's not just Tom. I'm sure we can all tell a story or two about forgetting something important. I've even shown up here a couple times, with my car keys, but not my set of office keys.

David Brooks who writes for the New York Times, wrote a column in which he commented that: "...the 21st century is going to be know as the Bad Memory Century."

He blames this on what he calles, information acceleration syndrome, which "means that more data is coursing through everybody's brains, but less of it actually sticks."

There are just too many voices competing for our attention, which makes it harder and harder to keep focused on the one True Voice, the voice of the One who said, "I am the Good Shepherd."

Thinking about all these counterfeit voices we're bombarded with reminds me of a story:

The story is about 4 people who were on an airplane. There was a pilot, the world's smartest man, a pastor, and a Boy Scout.

As they were flying along the plane started to have engine trouble. So the pilot made an announcement.

"We have two problems on this plane. One is that we are going to crash. And two is that we have four people on this plane and only three parachutes. I'm the pilot, I'm a family man, and I know where the parachutes are,"

so he grabbed one and jumped out.

The world's smartest man, turned to the other two and said,
"I am probably the world's most intelligent man, if I were to die there would be a void
of knowledge the neither of you could replace,"
so he grabbed one and jumped out.

So the pastor turned to the Boy Scout and said,
"I have lived a longer life, and I'm ready for heaven
I want you to take the last one."

But the Boy Scout just looked back at him and said,
"Cool it, Preacher, the world's smartest man just jumped out of the plane with my
backpack."

There are some very smart people in this world and all they are holding on to is a backpack.

Instead of listening to their Good Shepherd, they've been listening to a lot of counterfeit
voices. And listening to these counterfeit voices only leads to hurting yourself and hurting
those you love.

So why is it so easy to listen to these other voices?

How do we miss the voice of the Good Shepherd
who is calling us to safe pastures and life-giving water?

I think it has a lot to do with the fact that our culture has such a loud voice.
And it's hard to hear God's voice especially when we find the voices of our culture so
appealing.

For example, listen to this voice, and see if you haven't felt its strong pull.

A number of years ago, the General Manager of the Chicago Bulls,
was giving his explanation for Michael Jordan's first retirement from basketball,
and his pursuit of a career in professional baseball,

And he said,
"Michael's just following the American Dream. He reached the point where he didn't
have to do anything, and now he can do whatever he wants to do.
Does that voice sound appealing?"

I think if we're honest, that voice has a certain attraction
...no more responsibilities, unlimited income, and getting to do whatever we feel like doing.

Now you might be sitting out there thinking,
"What's wrong with that pastor? That sounds pretty good."

But I think if we listen closely this morning,
the voice of our Good Shepherd, Jesus would say,

“That may be the American Dream, but it's not my dream for you.

My dream for you is to have life, and live it abundantly. And you will find that life, as you live your life for me, and for others.”

In looking at our Gospel reading this morning we learn one consequence of listening to counterfeit voices. John's Gospel tells us that Shepherd knows his own sheep and calls them by name, and leads them.

But there are thieves and bandits who are trying to steal and kill and destroy the sheep. They try to sneak into the sheepfold by another way. They try to lure the sheep away. The thief or bandit is only out to make a buck, he cares nothing for the sheep, he only wants to use them to further his own interest.

That sounds an awful lot like the commercial voices in our culture that tell us we are not good looking enough, athletic enough, or smart enough. Or you fill in the blank. Whatever it is that makes you feel like you are not good enough, or you don't measure up.

And whatever it is, they tell you they have a product you can buy, that will take care of everything and make you happy.

When we turn our ears in the direction of these false voices, however, we will be left feeling empty and alone and spiritually hungry.

But our Gospel reading does not end there.

We are told of the one True Voice. The voice of the Good Shepherd, who lays his life down for his sheep. Whoever enters by Him, will be saved.

He is the One who came to seek and save the lost, The One who left the 99 and went out searching for the one lost sheep.

The Good Shepherd, who is Jesus, our Lord and Risen Savior, desires a relationship with each one of us. And he will lead us to streams of living water, and fill us with the meaning in life we're looking for.

If you are spiritually hungry today, the Good Shepherd is searching for you, and calling you to place your trust in him. God is calling all of us to turn your ears in his direction, and to listen for his guidance in each area of our lives.

If you sense that God is speaking this message especially to you this morning, you may also be asking,

"How can I tune in more and more to God's voice in my life, and how can I learn to resist the strong pull of other voices?"

Jesus answered that question, when he saw his weary disciples, and he said,
"Come to me, all you who are weary, and carry heavy burdens, and you will find your rest in me."

We say "but how Lord?"

And he simply says, "Come."

"Begin your day with me. Share your burdens with me."

Don't think of devotions or reading your Bible as a "have to" but as a break from your day, an oasis, a place of refreshment, and strength and wisdom.

Living in God's grace means that we don't have to live in fear of failure.

Living in God's grace means that you know you are loved, and forgiven.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has laid down his life for you and me, so that everyone who believes in his name might have life, and have it abundantly. Amen