

July 19, 2015
Christ Church
“The one true voice”
Glo Wellman preaching

John 10:1_18 The Message (MSG)

10 1_5 “Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he’s up to no good—a sheep rustler [a thief and a bandit]! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won’t follow a stranger’s voice but will scatter because they aren’t used to the sound of it.”

6_10 Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. “I’ll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn’t listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.

11_13 “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd puts the sheep before himself, sacrifices himself if necessary. A hired man is not a real shepherd. The sheep mean nothing to him. He sees a wolf come and runs for it, leaving the sheep to be ravaged and scattered by the wolf. He’s only in it for the money. The sheep don’t matter to him.

14_18 “I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me. In the same way, the Father knows me and I know the Father. I put the sheep before myself, sacrificing myself if necessary. You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them, too. They’ll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one Shepherd. This is why the Father loves me: because I freely lay down my life. And so I am free to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down; I also have the right to take it up again.

Reading and listening to this scripture several times using The Message as I prepared, there were words and phrases that spoke to me and came to me.

The gatekeeper opens the gate to the Shepherd and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his sheep by name and leads them ... and they follow because they are familiar with his voice.

All those others are up to no good—[false Gods, distractions, thieves in the night... they steal our soul, they rob our well being]

Anyone who goes through [the Gate] will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture [nurture and sustenance, comfort, healing and guidance.]. [They will find] real life, [an abundant life] more than they ever dreamed of.

“I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”

How comforting this is. How precious and even how rare it is to be known, really known by another, and really heard.... Do we recognize the voice of love... the voice of acceptance.... the voice of true guidance when we hear it?

Verse 16 in our scripture today is translated differently in different versions..... they will hear my voice...they will listen to my voice... they will respond to my voice. These have very different meanings.

We know how vital communication is to our relationships. And we know that listening is very important, maybe even the most important aspect of communication.

We can hear each other... hear the words, but are we really listening. When we listen, do we really understand? Sometimes we're too distracted so we're not listening deeply, giving this person the respect and full attention they deserve. And even if we have heard, how do we respond? What actions do we take?

I just returned from a trip up to Oregon for a niece's wedding. Al and I spent 24-7 together for 5 days. Mostly, this was an awesome trip.

But we did have several experiences that reminded us how difficult it is sometimes to communicate what we need or want... to really be heard.

At those times, it feels like we are speaking different languages. We each made assumptions about what the other person meant. And sometimes we were wrong. He and I have been together a long time, but we still sometimes miss the mark, especially when we get into the dangerous territory of assumptions.

I meant that I wanted him to turn off and make a stop, take a short side trip. He didn't hear it that way. He thought I was just thinking that might be a good idea some other time.... or.... I don't know.... so he didn't slow down and turn. I wasn't definitive and clear enough. Now, this happened several times. And most of the times it was okay with me that we just drove on.... I was not strongly invested in stopping. At least one time, I asked him to turn around. But, our mis-communication frustrated Al. Have I learned to communicate my needs more clearly? I'm not sure. I hope so... being heard and understood is not always easy.

What gets in the way? We have all wrestled with false gods.... thieves, distractions, that have lead us down paths that take us to confusion, wastelands, that keep us from really hearing each other.... television, chores and to-do lists, the musts and oughts and shoulds that keep us running and spinning.

Do we hear the voice of God, of wisdom, or right action when we need to? Good guidance is needed when we are trying to discern what our next life choices need to be. How can we be sure we really know and really understand what is the best action to take?

Listening is essential in life and it's difficult. We often listen partially. Or we listen for what we want to hear. Or we listen for a break in the conversation so we can put in our "two cents" or share our story.

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. [we can identify already!] He got nervous and tense about it. "I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day. Before long, things around our home started reflecting the patter of my hurry_up style. It was becoming unbearable.

"I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.'

"Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me ___ and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.'" "I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.'" (from Bits & Pieces, June 24, 1993, pp. 13_14.)

This reminds me... when our children were young, I told them it was okay to say to me, "Mom, you're not listening." because if they felt it, it must be true. I wasn't letting them know I heard them... that I heard their request or need or story. So, I would pause.... and listen again. If what they wanted was doable, we'd go with it. If it wouldn't work then, I'd let them know. But they felt heard.

Ross Campbell, author of How to really love your child calls this "Focused attention," giving eye contact or other signals that say, "I'm here with you now." Campbell went on to write another series of books with Gary Chapman about the five love languages. The five love languages are: words of assurance and affirmation, quality time, acts of service, giving gifts, and physical touch. We don't all receive love or understand that we are loved in exactly the same ways. For some of us, touch speaks volumes. For others, spending quality time together resonates. Still others appreciate positive affirmation or gifts and mementos. When someone helps out with acts of service, both people can feel the love and appreciation between them. Listening is absolutely the key to understanding which love languages are more meaningful for each person. When we are truly heard and known by another, we feel loved and that love is expressed in ways we can understand and feel deeply.

Certainly, as people of the Way... we are inspired by the message and guidance of Jesus. The Gate - the doorway.... the entry.... that passage into the wisdom, the good guidance... right thought and action. But, how does God speak to us? How do we know? Just like the love languages, we all experience God's presence and guidance in

our own ways. And we realize that in order to truly encounter Christ / hear God, we need to do our part. We need to pause, to stop long enough to breathe and to truly listen.

What helps to keep us on the right path? I believe it's too easy to casually say, "God, or Jesus, keeps me on my path." or "Jesus is my guiding light." Because, practically speaking, we know how easily we can become distracted. We know how often we forget and just move ahead, without pausing, without really considering the consequences.

There are Insights in our scripture about the shepherd -

He Calls the sheep by name.... we are known....we were knit into our mother's womb... there is nothing we can do or be that is not somehow familiar to the Shepherd.

The Shepherd leads them... offering wisdom and insight to guide us. Our job is to listen and really hear that "one true voice"

Because we are known.... and can feel that genuine connection and intimacy, we have within us the ability to recognize this voice... to trust it.

I am the Gate - the doorway.... the path

It is often said that prayer is talking with God, and that meditation is listening. A form of prayer and meditation that is also very helpful for me is writing. When I find a quiet time and place to open my journal and reflect, I am often surprised by the voice of spirit....or right action and wisdom that comes out on the paper. Prayer in whatever forms it takes is our open gateway to God.

Our part? To pause long enough, to be quiet and listen. Pause with me for a minute and - Be still, and know that I am God.

Be

Be Still

Be Still and

Be still and know

Be still and know that

Be still and know that I

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know that I am God.

John Fox has written a poem that beautifully reflects how it feels

When Someone Deeply Listens To You by John Fox

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.

When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.
When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.

When someone deeply listens to you
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!

When someone deeply listens to you
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

We are called by name. We are known. We can recognize and trust that voice of spirit.
We will find pasture, and abundance. May we be there for each other in this way
and may we cherish our God-times and create spaciousness in our days, finding places
that inspire us to pause and listen for that familiar, "one true, clear voice" that is our
guiding path.