

Sunday, April 17, 2016

Acts 9:36-43

John 10:22-30

Ministering to One Another

{Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Jesus is alive and is worthy of all our praise, joy time and life! And because Jesus is alive we have a church in which we may gather to grow in relationship with the Risen Christ and with each other. Throughout this season of Easter we will focus on the 5 purposes of the church and our focus today is Ministering to One another.}

When you cannot hear the tv or the radio playing very well what do you do? Turn it up in order to strengthen the sound and its volume. When you are eating something that is very bland and you want to change its flavour what do you? Add spices until it has a stronger taste. You improve the strength of the flavour.

But what happens if you call out to someone and they do not hear you? Or follow you or listen? Do you speak louder? Or merely go closer and talk to them directly in order to get their attention. The reason for this is so that your voice will be heard and others will listen.

Jesus spent time with many people in order that they might come to know him as the promised messiah, the Son of God. Prior to raising Lazarus to life and his own dying Jesus walked and talked, taught and performed many miracles. One day He was in Jerusalem in the winter and was at the temple near Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him and questioned him almost bullying or taunting him. They asked, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly?"

They wanted to know but instead of being direct with a response Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice."

With these words we hear those words which reflect the strong relationship between God and Jesus as Shepherd and those who believe and follow the sheep. Many people are comforted in these words as they hear Jesus

talk about his sheep who listen and follow and are ultimately protected and cared for by Him.

Jesus continues to talk with the Jews and as he does they grow angry with him. Some were even ready to throw rocks at him to stone him to death. But even then Jesus remained strong, asking them for which miracle they were going to stone Him.

Jesus was strong in his convictions, when he taught others and when he faced those who questioned him. His strength we know came from God as he continued to fulfill God's plan each day in order that the people would be ready to receive their messiah.

Jesus was strong physically and emotionally and his spiritual strength came from God the Father as he prayed and listened to his voice.

How do you become strong-er? We might interpret strength as body strength and as we grow older we often are not as strong. A young teenager can usually carry more weight than an older person—just by nature but this same young person can grow stronger if they work out or repeat the weightlifting tasks over and over again. This is the same for everyone—if we want to be stronger we must repeat our movements over and over again—whether it is our arms and shoulder muscles or whether it is our brains, or even our spiritual understanding of faith in God. Therefore in order to strengthen our faith we must do something. It does not just happen by itself we have to work at it.

Jesus was strong in faith- he devoted much time in prayer and study of the Hebrew scriptures of his Jewish upbringing. He grew stronger in faith and wisdom as he answered the questions of others. And through this encounter with the Jews we are invited to reflect upon the ways that we may become stronger in faith.

This is Good Shepherd Sunday when we imagine the shepherd standing between danger and the sheep; the shepherd sitting in the gateway of the sheep pen, the shepherd who keeps us from falling into danger, and calls us when we are about to go astray. And if we as the sheep know the shepherd, we hear his voice and follow. We follow in order to grow stronger in faith, in wisdom and knowledge of God and in relationship with Jesus himself.

But how do we grow strong-er? How do we come to know the voice of Jesus and know to follow him? We follow first by listening. We listen to Jesus and heeding his voice we already act to following. For just think about all distractions that there are around us—people talking, noise of traffic, people working with tools, children playing and then if we get into our own space—the laptop, the mp3 players, the tablet, phone, screens everywhere—how do we manage to ever think clearly without noise? We strive to listen. Just like Tabitha and then to minister to others as she did living as an example of Christ Jesus.

In our reading from Acts 9 we hear about Tabitha a.k.a.Dorcas. This woman was always doing good and helping the poor. However, Tabitha became sick and died and according to custom her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room as people prepared to mourn her death together. News spread and people quickly came to her bedside because they cared deeply for her.

Tabitha was known as a strong believer in Jesus and she had the strength to trust in God. She learned to live as close as she could to be like Christ. She was not afraid to hunger or thirst because she listened to the Shepherd's voice that nourished her. She believed and trusted in Jesus the Shepherd to see her through everything and she helped and ministered to others in the ways of Christ. But she was sick and died.

Tabitha/ Dorcas was truly loved for what she did to help others. When Peter arrived they showed him the robes and other clothing she had made. Peter got down on his knees and prayed. He said "Tabitha get up. " She got up and he took her hand and helped her to her feet. She was alive. And many people came to believe in the Lord through the raising of Dorcas. This was so that others would know of Jesus as Saviour, the disciples becoming known as leaders of faith and for those who grieved the death of Tabitha/Dorcas to understand how deep one's faith may grow.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and he says—my sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Are you his sheep? Do you listen to the voice of the Christ? Have you listened for God's voice speaking to you? Fulton Sheen states, "God whispers in our joys, speaks in our conscience, and shouts to us in our pain.=== "God whispers in our joys, speaks in our conscience, and shouts to us in our pain. (worth repeating!) But have you listened lately?

The busyness of spring now seems thrust upon us- instead of worrying about snow storms it is the question of when we can do the many tasks we are called to do or places to go. But what is essential is that we are doing and going to places where we might share the message of Christ—ministering/telling others about the Shepherd; talking about how he has touched your life, telling others of who you are and from where you get your strength as you continue to live your life.

As the Good Shepherd speaks, we answer that call because we are assured that God first called us by name. In doing so, God offered us the assurance that we can never be out of reach so long as we allow ourselves to be His sheep. Even though we seek to be strengthened in faith, we do find ourselves growing weak. When we do grow weaker we need only to listen and hear His voice which will call us back to where we belong.

Amidst all the noise in this world, listening to the Shepherd speak is the surest hope that we can be free from a lot of confusion and brokenness in our lives. Hearing Him speak will keep us on track. And even if we wander away, he will pick us up and carry us back, like the lost sheep that we become.

To listen to Jesus means opening your heart to the Spirit, and feeling his presence. It is all well and good to say "I believe' but if we don't pray ,sit with Him in silence what good does our faith do for us? If we are willing to take the effort to call ourselves Christians, we need to let Jesus have prime place in our lives. We need to let Christ speak so we may listen. Do this and you will receive your purpose and direction for what Christ is calling you to do in His name.. to minister with one another. Jesus is calling to you—Will you follow the shepherd?

Let us pray:

Wonderful God of praise and thanksgiving we your sheep are listening in this time of silence. Speak to us we pray. Call us to follow. Call us to serve. Call us to minister with one another in Christ's name. Amen.