

Sunday May 8 2022 Easter 4 New Life in the Shepherd

Psalm 23 Revelation 7:9-17 John 10:11-18, 22-30

“The Voice” is a wonderful music competition which engages the audience, the judges and all the competitors into a high energy contest. In its 22nd season in the US with different celebrity judges each season, this competition intrigues the audience from the start. The Voice is also a competition show around the world and enables people from all walks of life to sing on stage in front of the entire country. From blind auditions where the judges cannot see what the people look like to months later when the country votes who is the winner and wins a recording contract, this program keeps people watching each week. Whether it is the bantering between the judges and the reaction of the audiences or when we hear the stories of the contestant’s life and what winning the competition means for them there is a sense of hope shared. Why do we watch it? For the music itself, but also when we see someone’s dream coming true we can also believe it for ourselves.

“The Voice” is that voice which stands out from the crowd, the one that’s unique, heart-wrenching, and moving and uplifts us with its raw emotion and power. We are captivated by this voice that moves, lures, mesmerizes us, intrigues us, and engages us. We become loyal to that voice and we hope that this person will win! The winner is a crowd pleaser, a unanimously voted-for individual, the one who has won us over with the beauty and resonance of “that amazing voice!” As we watch this program we live vicariously through the victories of the triumphant and rejoice in the fulfillment of the dreams of these others. This “voice” is our voice. That win is our win. But there is another voice to which we should be listening and this voice leads us to the most precious gift- eternal life.

Today is Christian Family Sunday, Mother’s Day and what is know as Good Shepherd Sunday. Our focus is on beloved scripture passages which help us to grow in our relationship with God, Jesus and the Spirit through the image of the Good Shepherd. Psalm 23 is one of the

most beloved, memorized, and quoted scripture passages of the Bible and for most people the King James Version is the one that speaks to the hearts of many because of its familiar phrases, poetry and old English word us of Thou and Thy. This Psalm of David has been translated many times. It has also been set to music for singing under different genres both contemporary and within church history. It is one of the most endearing passages as it brings comfort, hope and the promise of hope after death. For the shepherd mentioned is God who provides everything in our lives and is with us with us as we prepare for the promised life after our time on earth ends. The question we might ask is do you know the Shepherd?

Another passage we focus on today is from John 10 where Jesus is described as the Good Shepherd. There are paintings galore of this image with him walking the pastures filled with sheep and them following along. He is often depicted as smiling, not holding a crook, but carrying a little lamb in his arms or around his head. The sheep are often seen almost smiling as they surround Jesus and there is contentment on everyone's face. Jesus is the shepherd who looks after sheep and will do so no matter the situation as they grow and produce wool and the next generations. I am the good shepherd. But we also have to remember that Jesus was also called the Lamb of God. Why? Before Jesus died it was part of the Jewish Passover feast that a lamb was killed and its blood placed over the doorposts signifying that the family who lived there served God and had followed the tradition from the time of the Exodus. Jesus became the One, the Lamb for whoever would believe that died in our place once and for all time. So when we call on Jesus we may call him the Lamb who was slain, but also the Good Shepherd who calls us and knows us by name.

We have often been taught that sheep are not necessarily bright and need constant tending. According to Barbara Brown Taylor in her book, "The Preaching Life", a conversation she had with a sheep farmer contradicts this notion. According to the sheep farmer, "It is the cattle ranchers who are responsible for spreading that ugly rumor, and all because sheep do not

behave like cows. "Cattle are herded from the rear by hooting cowboys with cracking whips, but that will not work with sheep at all. Stand behind them making loud noises and all they will do is run around behind you, because they prefer to be led. You push cows, her friend said, but you lead sheep, and they will not go anywhere that someone else does not go first-namely, their shepherd-who goes ahead of them to show them that everything is all right."

So when we think of sheep- they need a shepherd to guide them to still waters, protect them from predators like wolves, and watch over them as they graze. It is the shepherd who acts as the gate at a sheepfold. As Jesus states, "I know my sheep and the sheep know me.- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father." They know me and they know my voice. My sheep hear my voice and they follow."

As Christians, as a church family in faith, are you listening to the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and are you following? To know the shepherd means believing in Jesus as the Lamb who died on the cross in your place. IT means believing in the One who rose from death to new life. It means believing that Jesus is now one with God in heaven and it is His voice who is calling to you now. And why? Why do we want to follow Jesus' voice? So that we may dwell in the house of Lord forever.

Our reading from Revelation 7 gives us a glimpse of the glory of heaven where we want to dwell for eternity. There is a multitude gathered and all are crying out "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb. And they are singing," Amen ! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever." And who makes up the multitude of those gathered? They are those who believe in the Lamb, the Good Shepherd Christ Jesus and he will guide them to springs of the water of life as God wipes away every tear from their eyes."

As we focus on Christian families and mothers today, we pray in our hearts for all to know the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the One who was the Lamb and the One who still calls us to follow. Just as he said to Peter and the other disciples, "Follow me." He is still seeking the lost lambs, wondering when we will say ok, we cannot live this life on our own. We need you to guide us and help us as we hear stories of despair—people diagnosed with cancer again, people suffering from the devastation of war and deep losses, people arguing in families and searching for peace within themselves and people seeking hope. Hope for a better tomorrow because today is not all sunny and happy. There are many filled with sorrow and loss, and remembering beloved mothers and grandmothers who are experiencing God's glory. People are seeking hope for a better tomorrow as flowers bloom and skies are bluer and the heat of the spring sun invites us outside to shine in new ways. If we answer Jesus' call to follow, we are not guaranteed blue skies and sunshine every day; but when we do experience difficult moments and times of uncertainty, we can turn to Christ and to the Spirit, which is in our midst in this moment, for help and guidance, for comfort and for support.

We need to know the Shepherd. To know the shepherd is to know Christ as the one who calls disciples to faithful service, to share and show love and to seek ways of reaching out in kindness and love. When we accept Christ and follow where he will lead us, we will truly have new life in the Good Shepherd.

PRAYER: God of grace and love, we thank you for callus into relationship with one another and with you. Thank you for the joys and the responsibilities that grow within us. Help us to experience your voice when we get confused, lost, or frustrated and guide us to places of hope and new life. We ask in the name of the Good Shepherd who calls to us now. SILENCE> Amen.