

## The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want Psalm 23

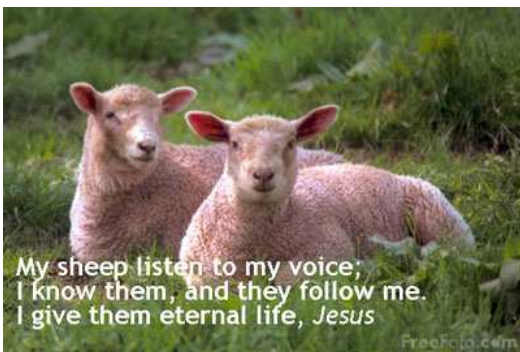
### Gospel Reading John 10:1-10

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him,

and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

### Commentary



The reason the sheep knew the shepherd in Jesus' metaphor is that they heard the shepherd's voice and they recognised it. They didn't recognise the voice of strangers. We, *'the sheep of his hand'* need to hear Jesus' voice and know his voice, be familiar with his voice, but how are we to do that? Knowing a voice means that we have heard it often, and more importantly that we have listened to the voice. Hearing and listening are not synonymous, but both are required in knowing a voice. Hearing alerts us to the

timbre of someone's voice, the intonation, the volume, and the quality and is a significant part of recognising their voice. Sometimes that's enough. It will mean, for example, that we know when a person we love has entered a room. In a relationship we need to do more than hear someone's voice, we need to listen to their voice, listen to the words they say, the tone of their voice so we can discern the nuances and so fully understand what they're saying. That's reasonably easy when we can hear a voice with our ears but we won't 'hear' Jesus' voice aloud so we need to learn to recognise and 'hear' his voice in different ways.

An obvious starting point for hearing Jesus' voice is reading the Gospels. It is very easy to read the Gospels rather quickly, not really taking in what they say, because the words are all so familiar. We need to pause and take time to really listen to what they say. The Venite is helpful here too, *'O come, let us worship, and fall down : and kneel before the Lord our Maker.'* I am not suggesting that we 'fall down' or even 'kneel' but those words suggest that we should listen to God, to Jesus our Shepherd, in the context of worship and prayer. The writer of Psalm 46

encourage us to *'Be still, and know that I am God!'* (v10). If we are to discern God speaking to us through scripture we need to still our hearts, still our minds and still our bodies and that takes time and also practice. Another Psalm encourages us to *'Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;'* (Psalm 37:7). It's so easy when we meet with God to hurriedly read the passage(s) for the day, say a few quick prayers and rush off to get on with the day, if we even do that. Rather, we are encouraged to be patient and wait in the stillness we have created (yes, we need to consciously make ourselves and our environment still and listen for God speaking to us through his word. Having stilled ourselves before prayerfully reading scripture, it is good to have a sense of expectancy as we read. That expectancy comes from being aware that Jesus, our Shepherd, knows us by name, calls us by name, wants us to know and hear his voice and so will want to speak to us.

Listening for Jesus' voice in this way won't mean the words suddenly seem to leap out of the page at us with startling relevance to the big issues in our lives, though this has been some people's (rare) experience. It may mean the words we read cause us to pause and ponder and reflect and perhaps lead us into further understanding of their meaning and in particular their meaning for us. As we spend time and more focused, still time in prayerful reading of God's word, we will become more familiar with 'the mind of Christ' and our thinking and behaving will be more Christ-like. This is another way in which we 'hear' and know the voice of our Shepherd. Our behaviour will be a reflection of the internalised voice of God. Jesus, our Shepherd, longs for us to know and hear his voice, Our part is to give him the opportunity to speak to us. *Jennie Cappleman*

### **Meditation**

An Episcopalian bishop who served for many years in the upper Midwest tells stories he learned from the Native Americans of the area:

A wise man among the Indians—many Native Americans in the Midwest still prefer to be called Indians—was asked by his grandson about the conflict and discord in the world today. The elder reflected for a moment and then replied, "My child, there are two dogs battling within my heart. One is full of anger, hatred, and rage. The other is full of love, forgiveness, and peace." The old man paused, and he and his grandson sat for a moment in silence. Finally the boy spoke, "Grandfather, which dog will win the battle in your heart? The one filled with hatred or the one filled with love?" The old man looked at his grandson and replied, "The one I feed will win."

### **Prayers for Sunday and the week ahead**

Christ the good shepherd, grant to all whom you have called to positions of leadership in this and every land, strength, wisdom and integrity, that they may feed the people committed to their charge, and lead them beside the waters of peace. Amen

God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, with the blood of the eternal covenant: make us perfect in every good work to do your will, and work in us that which is well-pleasing in your sight; and may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen

God of new beginnings, our love to us knows neither measure nor end. Reveal yourself to us in the ordinary things of life, so that each day's tasks may be done for love of you and each day's living may bring us nearer you; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour. (*Orthodox prayer*)