

In John, Jesus is talking to the unbelieving Jews who gathered around him, perhaps to taunt him, perhaps to actually accuse him as they will and did which led him to his crucifixion, and maybe there were some there who were actually curious but Jesus answer to them all is the same. “I’ve already identified myself but you don’t believe me. I have told you, I have performed signs and wonders, miracles if you will, before you, and yet you do not believe. What good would it do to do one more or claim it one more time? Those that believe, believe by faith and they know me and I know them. Those that don’t believe, there is little else I could do that I haven’t already done to show them who I am.

As a pastor I hear these same statements made by the skeptical and unbelieving who think they would believe ... if only. And their statements sound very much like these first century Jews. Pastor, why doesn’t Jesus do any miracles today? If only God would perform some of the miracles today, then I would believe. To those folks as to the first century Jews, Jesus answer is the same...”Been there done that.” And the result was that many believed then and even now when hungry ones read about Jesus and his ministry, they are moved to believe.

Jesus knew that people would always be asking this same question. So he answers it to once and for all. "I have already identified myself but you don't believe me." The ones who do believe know me and are my sheep and I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

It's not that Jesus is untouched by the cries of the doubting ones. After all, he showed himself to Thomas who refused to believe unless he touched the scar in his side and saw the holes in his hands. But his response to Thomas after meeting his needs was how much more blessed will the ones who do not see, yet believe are.

We are the ones who have not seen yet believe. We are the sheep who know Jesus' voice. Or do we.

All week long I have been thinking about this. "The sheep know my voice" I know them and they follow me." I have been thinking, "Do I know Jesus' voice?" What does it sound like? Where does it lead me?" And I came to the conclusion that perhaps I do not hear our ShePherd's voice because I am too busy talking and telling him what I think I need. Then while studying this passage I came across some notes of another pastor, Bass Mitchell and this is what he said when he was complaining about being referred to as a sheep. For Bass being a sheep was an insult and he explains it this way.:

He refers to us as “sheep!” Now I must admit that I am no expert on sheep but I’m not sure he was paying us a compliment. I mean, have you ever been around sheep very much? Notice that whenever a human being is around, they come up and start baaing. They want something from you and they keep baaing until you give it to them. They are so needy. Not only this, they get lost so easily. I hear they are nearsighted and go from one clump of grass to another and pretty soon they are lost, and end up looking around and wondering where everyone went. And add to this the fact that somewhere I have read that sheep have been known to sleep on top of one another on cold nights and the ones on the bottom suffocate. Now add to this that sheep do not have the most pleasant odors either. They are smelly. SO they are so needy all the time, get lost easily, are kind of dumb and downright smelly....I’m not sure I like being called a sheep.

There it was! I didn’t even get it the first time I read it. But later he amplified his thoughts a bit, “I hate to admit it, but it’s true. I’m needy. I want and need so much. We all do. We spend pretty much all day baaing away. Just think of all the things, the material things we need and use every day...food...water....air...clothing...sunshine...companionship...light....sleep...work...we are always baaing about something, wanting, needing, something from the shepherd. That’s when I got it through to my head. Maybe I can’t hear the shepherds’ voice because I am too busy baaing what I need to be happier on this earth than to listen to what and where the

Shepherd is leading me. I am too busy looking at what I don't have, wish I had, think I should have and baaing all about it to God that I rarely am quiet enough to hear what the shepherd is saying to me.

“My sheep hear my voice. I know them. They follow me.”

When was the last time you truly heard Jesus' voice? What does it sound like? If I gave you a pencil and paper and asked you to write out what the voice of your Shepherd sounded like, could you do it? What would you write? If I asked you what was the greatest thing that the shepherd has ever told you, what would you write? If I asked you where has the shepherd led you? Through what valley of darkness? Into what green pastures, What would you write?

I think I would need some extra time for some of these questions.

But the truth is that the shepherd does lead us, even when we are baaing our loudest. He is the good shepherd and does care for us even when he has to personally carry us through the valley of the shadow of death, he does it. Because he is the good shepherd. Yet it is still very important for us to develop an ear to be able to hear the voice of the good shepherd. I know this is true because many of you know that last week I got a new little girl puppy.

She will eventually grow up and mate with Munchkin my mail Maltese. But right now she is a pup and she is my pup and I am busy teaching her two things. One, my voice and my hands take care of her and two, her name, Zoey. So all day long, no matter what we are doing, I talk to her. And I begin almost every sentence with her name. "Zoey, let's go into the back yard." Zoey, Come. Zoey, Want to go for a ride? Here Zoey. Zoey, Want a treat? And little by little she is getting it. She is beginning to recognize her name and my voice. It is great. It is fun. But it is not for my good pleasure but for her protection that she must learn my voice, her name, and a few commands. For I know if she responds to her name and my voice if she is near to danger, I might be able to prevent her from getting hurt by calling her name and giving her a command to "down, zoey".

Well, our shepherd is faced with the same challenge. If we do not learn his voice, his ways, then when we are headed for danger, we will not hear him or we will chose to ignore him. There is still a lot of that with my easily distracted puppy. Although she is responding more and more readily to my voice and my command, she is often overwhelmed by some blade of grass that is taller than her or a smell that was left behind by some passing animal before her and she either doesn't hear my voice at all or chooses to

ignore it altogether. ??? Can a puppy this big chose to ignore my voice? ? I think so.

I also think we do it all the time to God. And it is to dangerous. Because God knows when we are heading for a cliff where we will be plummeted into the depths of despair and God would do anything to ward us off but in order to do so, 1) WE have to know his voice and 2) we have to be willing to heed his voice. Listen and obey. If we are on a course of our own choosing and God is trying to turn us around and say, "Son, Daughter, don't go down that route. It isn't a safe route." But we don't give heed, we don't listen, we don't obey, but we keep trotting merrily down the forbidden path, what are we going to say, when we are crumbled in a heap at the bottom of some unforgiving gorge? We will be saying the same thing as we always say, "baaah, baaah, Shepherd, where are you?" So it is important that we develop an ear and a trust for our shepherd's voice. There will always be voices, well-meaning or evil, trying to get off us off the true path; trying to lure us away from God's ways. But if we know our master's voice and are willing to obey and stay close to him, we will remain safe.

I heard a story that illustrates this well,

“A pastor was taking a group of parishioners on tour of the Holy Land. He had just read them the parable of the good shepherd and was explaining to them that as they went along.... they would see shepherds on the hillsides just as they were in Jesus’ day. He wanted to impress the group, so he told them what just about every good pastor tells his people about shepherds. He told them how, in the Holy Land the shepherds always LEAD their sheep. How they would always go out in front bearing up under all the dangers...always protecting the sheep by going ahead of them. He barely got the last word out when sure enough they rounded a corner and there was a man and his sheep on the hillside. There was only one problem: the man wasn’t leading the sheep, as the good pastor had said. No. He was behind the sheep and he seemed to be chasing them. The pastor turned red and was flabbergasted. He ran over to the fence and engaged the man and said, “I always thought shepherds in this region led their sheep...went out in front...I told my people that a good shepherd in this region never chases his sheep.” The man replied, “That’s absolutely true...you’re absolutely right. But I’m not the shepherd, I’m the butcher!”

Ladies and Gentleman of East Avenue United Methodist Church,  
“Beware of the voice of the Butcher!”

At this time I would like the ushers to pass out the papers. They also have pencils if you need something to write with. I want us to go back to the questions I raised in the sermon and write your answers on the paper provided. I will not be reading these, so feel free to put your honest answers on the paper.

- 1) "Do I know Jesus' voice?" What does it sound like? Where has it lead me?"
- 2) When do I chose not to listen? When have I gotten into trouble because I didn't listen to his voice?
- 3) What is the greatest thing I have heard him say? When have I been blessed because I have listened?
- 4) Have I ever been confused as to whose voice I was listening to?
- 5) Do I ever Baah my needs so loudly that I can't hear what it is God is saying?

Maybe the best way to learn of Jesus' voice is to study the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. It describes perfectly what it is like to walk close to the shepherd on a daily basis. At this time let us jump ahead in our bulletin to that Psalm and as we read it, listen for clues as to what the shepherd's voice might sound like if we listened.

4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER  
4/21/2013

JOHN 10:22-30; PSALM 23  
My Sheep Know My Voice