

John 10:11-18

April 25, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our loving parent, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I was young, I would spend summers outdoor shooting baskets, riding my bike, or chipping golf balls around the yard. Often, mom would yell from the house, "Chad, it's time to come in to ... clean your room, eat lunch, etc." I would usually ignore it until the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> call. It was not that I did not hear her, but more what I was doing at the time was more fun than the alternative. I simply chose to block out her voice and rather follow the voice of fun and adventure.

Over the course of my life, I have realized there are many voices calling out vying for our attention. Sometimes those voices are from God; however, many times those voices are of the world and perhaps, even of Satan. As I was discerning my call to seminary, I was working within the insurance industry. After being with the same company for about 10 years I had recently moved to a different company, still insurance, but in an entirely different role I was unfamiliar with, struggled at, and pondered many days if I had made a mistake. It was during this time I would often find myself eating lunch in my car and praying to God to get me through the day. At times, those prayers would give way to tears as I dreaded going back into the office. But during those quiet moments I began to hear the Shepherd's voice leading me in a new direction. As I talked to my pastors at the time and others, they too spoke words of the Shepherd that affirmed my call to seminary. However, amid listening to the Shepherd's voice, the voices of wolves and thieves began to call out saying, "Are you crazy? You can't do that!" "You have to provide for your family." Those voices did a good job of drowning out the voice of the Shepherd. Those voices brought me low and dissuade me from following the path laid out by the Good Shepherd.

At times it seemed like the Shepherd's voice was nowhere to be found but lo and behold it was still calling. He was still there but I had just chosen to listen to other voices that promised wealth, happiness, and prosperity but ultimately led me in the completely opposite direction of despair and a sense of abandonment. Thankfully, the Shepherd continued to call, continued to bring me back into the fold, and guide me away from the wolves.

I can only imagine as John recollected these words spoken by Jesus, wrote them down and shared them with the young church they provided much needed comfort and hope amid a pack of wolves. They had to be frightened as the young church was enduring persecution; wondering where the Good Shepherd was. They had to be surrounded by many voices telling them to "give up", "come to their senses", "they were crazy", and "to save themselves." I imagine these words were as comforting to them as the words of Psalm 23 are for so many in times of loneliness, grief, and despair still today. In speaking these words to the young church John's voice was giving witness to the voice of the Good Shepherd during their plight revealing and bringing near His presence, love, comfort, and voice continuing to call to them, lead them, and remind them He is with them – the Good Shepherd knows what they are enduring and will ultimately lead them through whatever wolf stands in their way. I imagine hearing these words as they seemingly walked through the valley of the shadow of death the promise of Psalm 23 also echoed in their minds, "I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

We are each bombarded by a barrage of voices calling out to us. We can choose to listen to those that promise life but ultimately provide only momentary happiness. We can choose to listen to those that say we can go it alone without the help of anyone else, especially our Lord. We can choose to listen to those that turn our allegiance to worldly things. We can choose to listen to those voices that seek first our own interest. We can choose and we do – but thankfully the Good Shepherd continues to call.

Thankfully, the Good Shepherd continues to know the sheep and by His love enable his sheep to know Him and be joined into the beautiful relationship he has with his father. Thankfully, the Good Shepherd's love continues to fill us and strengthen us to resist the voices of the wolves in our midst. Do you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling to you?

It can be difficult to discern what is the voice of Christ and what is the voice of something else. Yet, Jesus gives us much insight into discerning this amid so many competing voices. His voice is the voice of love. It is the voice that puts the sheep before himself. It is the voice constantly calling out for the one-lost sheep. It is the voice of reconciliation and inclusion. It is the voice that heals and gives hope. It is a voice that no matter the cost proclaims the liberating love of God. A voice that speaks anything else must cause us to stop and ponder, is this the voice of the Good Shepherd? Or is it something else?

Jesus is calling, always calling. He knows his sheep. He knows you. He loves you. He enfolds you in his tender care. When you feel lost, alone, frightened or question his voice is still there – stop and listen? Look toward the cross. Look toward the empty tomb. Look toward the font in which you were baptized into storied waters and heard the voice that said you are my beloved and precious child. Look toward the word of God and hear the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. His voice is there. It is with us.