

## **The King of Love My Shepherd Is**

This Sunday, as always on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we will be celebrating Good Shepherd Sunday. We will hear how Jesus, the good shepherd, calls us by name into a life of love and abundance with God. He calls us each by name with an invitation to enter the fold and be saved from all that would rob us of wholeness.

To accept his invitation, we are told, we have only to listen for his voice and follow. If we will but hear his voice, we will not be lost or left alone in those dangerous places that try the heart and test the human spirit.

In our familiarity with the “Good Shepherd” passages that we hear this time each year, we sometimes find the context of these passages easy to forget. Over time the image of Jesus as our shepherd has become such a warm and comforting one, and rightly so.

But we forget that even as Jesus is speaking these words, the plans to arrest and kill him are already in progress and in fact they attempt to stone him to death following an exchange in the portico of Solomon, but he escapes.

Jesus knows that he is in an increasingly hostile environment and he has already made several statements about his identity that have gone unheard by those who question him relentlessly. If you will not hear me he says, look at the works that I do in my Father’s name, they testify to who I am.

Jesus says that he and the Father are one, they are united in purpose and that God knows us and wants us to know the fullness of God’s love. In his earlier statements Jesus has spoken quite clearly. He tells us I AM. I AM the bread of life, I AM the gate and I AM the shepherd. I’m reminded of the voice of God coming to Moses, “I AM THAT I AM” when Moses asks who is speaking. Jesus and the Great I AM are one.

We not only hear who Jesus is, but we hear who we are as well. We are individuals who are called by Christ to form a community. We are all Christ’s own, called by name to gather together and create a place of compassion and welcome. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are those under his care.

As his beloved we are to actively listen for the sound of his voice. We are to listen for the sound of his voice as he calls to us amid the clamor and stampede of a world that fills our ears with messages that are often at odds with what God knows will give us true life.

We live in a world of loudly competing voices that stridently speak to us in turn of doom and hopelessness, greed and domination--- voices that call for violent retribution whenever we feel threatened. And we are all vulnerable to these voices. That’s what makes their call so insidious.

We know these voices...these are voices of destruction and disintegration for there is nothing of hope, unity or reconciliation in them. And the real danger of listening to these voices is that they

do not remain outside these church walls. We track them into our communal life like hidden time bombs.

We bring the poisonous chatter of these voices into our churches unawares and soon we appropriate them for God and we decide that they contain religious wisdom-----Much of the pain and suffering that we lay at God's feet is and has always been manmade.

But there is another voice. The voice of the True Shepherd is steady, constant and eternal. The voice that calls to us to enter in through him to abundant life is a still, small voice that has great power and can penetrate the clamor of our world.

This voice calls us to justice, beauty and mercy. Jesus voice comes into our midst and it binds us in love to those around us. This voice calls us into the fold and tells us we do not stand-alone. Jesus' voice penetrates our hearts with the knowledge and truth of God's love.

Jesus comes to us---wherever we are---and calls us by name. Jesus calls us into a life of love and abundance with God, and desires nothing more than that we may hear his voice and enter into that abundant life. Not a life free of peril, danger, or pain, but a life lived without fear and measured by the giving and receiving of endless grace.

Good Shepherd Sunday reminds us that we have a choice. Will we listen for Jesus' voice or will we surrender to the madness. The Good News is that Christ calls endlessly, everyday, and will continue to call to us for an eternity. Oh that today we would hearken to his voice.

He Is Risen, Alleluia!

Stephanie+