

Sermons at the  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

May 11, 2025 (4th Sunday of Easter, Year C)  
John 10:22-30  
Psalm 23

From 1928 through 1942, children in many schools in America learned to know the voice of Walter Damrosch, the host of 'Music Appreciation Hour,' a radio broadcast from NBC. He taught thousands of boys and girls to know and love music. Classes stopped at a certain hour, the school radio was switched on, and then his familiar voice was heard: "Good morning, my dear children." They then enjoyed a half-hour of beautiful music, and he would tell them the message and the MEANING WITHIN the music.

One day, Mr. Damrosch was asked by the headmaster of a school to come and TALK to the boys and girls. He sat on the platform and the children fidgeted, for he was an old man, and they knew that old men very often make long speeches. The headmaster let him introduce himself. Mr. Damrosch stood up and smiled, but no one knew him. Then he said, "Good morning, my dear children," and immediately the whole room was in an uproar. The children clapped and cheered.

Mr. Damrosch said, "And why do you cheer? You do not know me."

"Yes, we do," came the answer, "we know your voice."

Today we hear once again about the voice of the Good Shepherd. In our Gospel today, Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me." We hear our shepherd promise to lead us and guide us, to comfort us, to watch over his flock and protect us. It's a wonderful voice.

The problem is that our world is full of OTHER voices TOO—voices calling us in DIFFERENT directions. Sometimes the call of our Shepherd is "hidden" in the clamor of the crowd. Other FALSE shepherds try to tempt us AWAY from the Good Shepherd, from the JOY of his forgiveness and the SECURITY of his love.

We've seen that happen, haven't we? People get led astray? Just look at the news headlines, and you'll see one lost sheep after another. We've seen it happen in DRAMATIC and sometimes DEADLY ways.

But MOST often, we see the shadow of death in more SUBTLE ways. Battered by the storms of life, and distracted by voices urging us to go this way and that, sometimes we lose our bearings, and we don't know where we ARE, or where we're going. We feel ... LOST.

A story is told of a farmer who had just rescued a lost sheep. When asked how the sheep GOT lost, the farmer replied, "They just NIBBLE themselves lost. They go from one tuft of grass to another, until at last they've lost their way."

That's what happens in life, isn't it? We NIBBLE away at life, from one thing to the next, until we realize that it's all gone, and we have no idea where it went, and where we are. We feel LOST.

And that can be MORE than a little frightening—it leads to despair, to hopelessness. When we're weak and confused, we'll follow ANYONE, ANY voice promising a MOMENT of happiness, a GLIMMER of peace or forgetfulness, even the SMALLEST sense that we ARE someone.

Our Lord says, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me." He promises that we'll KNOW his voice, but we ASK, "HOW?" How do we DISTINGUISH our shepherd's voice from all those OTHER voices calling us? Sometimes it's hard to know what to DO, and what to BELIEVE; to know what's RIGHT and what's WRONG. We live in a world of confusing and mixed messages, so how can we be SURE we're following the RIGHT path? How can we TELL when it's JESUS who's calling us, and when it's someone ELSE?

It's said that infants can recognize their parents' voices, especially the MOTHER'S voice, as early as a few MONTHS old. SOME mothers say their baby knows their voice as soon as they're BORN.

Babies KNOW their mother's VOICE, because of what it PROMISES them. It PROMISES that their needs are met. It means that they'll always be CARED for and nurtured, held and loved. It's a strong but gentle voice that says, "I LOVE you, and I'm not going to let ANYTHING HURT you."

That's what our SHEPHERD'S voice is like. It's the voice of LOVE, and comfort, and protection.

We can hear it in the Twenty-third Psalm. That's why it's one of the most WELL-KNOWN and LOVED passages in the WHOLE BIBLE. It's a kind of prayer. It's the word of GOD SPEAKING to us. IN that psalm, we HEAR our shepherd's VOICE.

Like the baby knows its mother's voice, we know our SHEPHERD'S voice by what it PROMISES. JESUS PROMISES LIFE. And when we follow our shepherd, we HAVE life. We have it ABUNDANTLY.

Life is ABOUT FOLLOWING our shepherd and growing CLOSER to him. He leads us and guides us. He feeds us and protects us. And when we're AFRAID, he holds us and comforts us. Jesus gives us LIFE, and, as the psalm says, our "CUP RUNNETH over." THAT'S what our shepherd's voices sounds like. It's a BEAUTIFUL voice.

Out in the world, there are STILL COMPETING voices, and false prophets, and empty promises about the "SECRET" to happiness. Like sheep, sometimes we STUMBLE, but our shepherd picks us UP. Sometimes we're WEAK, but our shepherd CARRIES us. And sometimes we're led astray (we ARE sheep after all, which means we're NOT that smart), but WHEN we lose our way, (not IF, WHEN we lose our way) our shepherd CALLS for us. And he KEEPS ON calling, and he NEVER STOPS. He NEVER GIVES up on us.

AMIDST ALL those COMPETING voices, our SHEPHERD'S voice is NOT drowned out. He calls and we HEAR his voice. We KNOW our shepherd's voice, because we've heard it so OFTEN HERE, in the SHEEPFOLD, in WORSHIP. We hear him in our HEARTS, through his Word, and water, and meal. We hear his voice in prayer. We hear him in the FAITH of our PARENTS, and in the FELLOWSHIP of our FRIENDS.

I've talked to men in the Men in Mission breakfast on Wednesdays who say THAT GROUP LITERALLY SAVED their LIFE. They'd LOST ALL HOPE, but they HEARD their SHEPHERD'S VOICE, in the Bible study, sure, but MOSTLY in the PEOPLE. HIS VOICE SAVES LIVES.

Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice." We KNOW his voice because of what it promises—it promises comfort, and protection, and guidance. He calls us to follow on a path that He HIMSELF travels: the path, not of power and control, but of weakness and vulnerability, of service and openness to others. We KNOW our shepherd's voice, because it's the voice of LOVE. And THAT voice is different than ANYTHING you'll hear out there in the WORLD. HIS voice is UNMISTAKABLE.

Let us pray: We are your sheep, O Lord, and you are our shepherd. Though we so often roam into the wrong paths, endangering ourselves and others, you continue to seek us out and lead us back into the right way. When the storms come, the wind blows, and the lightning strikes, we are thankful for your calm and loving presence. Even as the forces of evil come against us like wild animals, we are thankful for your strong protection. You are a shepherd who loves and cares for the flock; we praise you for your faithfulness, and rest in your power. When we stray, bring us back; when we falter, lift us up; when we struggle, carry us on. Keep us ever mindful that we are baptized, and we are YOURS. Help us to say, "Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Amen.