



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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April 29, 2007
4th Sunday of Easter
John 10:22-30
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 13:15, 16a, 26-33
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 23
Second Lesson: Revelation 7:9-17
Gospel: John 10:22-30

Listen to Your Shepherd's Voice

The vast, vast majority of people in this world, the people that you meet, are able to do this and yet at times, over time it gets worse and worse, and it is a difficult thing as this goes away. What I am talking about is hearing. The vast majority of people are born able to hear, right? Some people might have selective hearing. Some people go through the difficult process of losing their hearing and aren't able to hear as they once could. It brings on challenges. It brings on difficulty. But the vast majority of the people you meet have that ability to hear.

But think about it for a second. Think of all the people that you meet. Think of the people that you come into contact with from time to time. Think of the people in your family. They might have the ability to hear, but how many of them have the ability to listen. Listening and hearing aren't exactly the same thing, are they?

Listening isn't always easy. Did you ever talk with someone and as they are saying something to you, you are already thinking about how you are going to answer what they said and you don't hear a word from that point on? You don't quite hear what they said, so you are talking past them because you didn't really listen intently to what they said and consider what they said because you are so busy worrying about what you are going to say.

Listening isn't always easy. Sometimes we are distracted. Sometimes we are tired. Sometimes we are just plain ornery and we don't listen. Sometimes we are doing something else.

I remember as a child when we were studying, I don't remember what grade I was in, it was pretty early on, when we were studying in school the teaching of the Triune God, something you can't understand, just something you believe, something Scripture lays out for us—three persons in one God—yet as a kid, I wanted to figure it out. So I came up with my own solution and I went and explained it to my father one evening. He happened to be reading the paper. After I got done explaining it to him, he kind of grunted a "yes" at me. I toddled off thinking, "There. I have solved that riddle of the ages. Now what else can I take care of today?" I don't think he really heard a word I said. He just knew there was some voice beyond the newspaper making noise that was probably distracting him from reading his newspaper.

Listening isn't something we are always good at. Even as Christians we hear God's Word, but do we always listen to it? We read God's Word, but do we always listen to what we read, or do the Words just pass in front of our eyes at times?

Hearing versus listening—isn't that exactly what is in the gospel in John 10 today? "Tell us plainly. We've heard you talk over and over, but we can't understand it because you talk in parables. You talk in all these other things. We don't get what you are saying. Just tell us plainly. Enough is enough. Are you the promised Messiah?" They had heard him but they didn't listen to his words. They didn't listen to them and apply them and believe them.

So the lesson for you and me today as we gather together this morning is, don't just hear the Word. Listen to your Good Shepherd's voice. Pay close attention to it. Apply it to your life. Don't just let it be something like "There. I put in my time. I went to church. I heard God's Word. Now I can get back to whatever it is." Listen to the Word. Don't just read your books or your Bibles in the morning or in the evening or a devotion book, but listen to it. In our Good Shepherd's voice we hear the answers to eternal questions. The answers that we hear give us eternal confidence—a confidence that is necessary as we live in a sinful fallen world.

You've heard the question a couple of times now, "Tell us plainly. Are you the Messiah? We have heard all the rigmarole. Just say 'yes' or 'no' and then we can get on with what we want to do." What they wanted to do wasn't necessarily to believe. It wasn't, "We want to hear it because we are really interested. We think you might be and we really aren't sure. We really want to know." They wanted to have something they could trip Jesus up with, so they could discredit him before the people, so that they could accuse him of blasphemy and kill him because he was claiming to be the Messiah, which they did not believe.

Just like talking to someone with selective hearing, Jesus said to them, "I've already answered it. It's a question that has been asked and answered, but you didn't pay attention to the answer because you didn't like the answer because you don't believe in me because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice. When they have questions of eternal significance like, 'who am I' or 'where am I going' or 'how am I going to get there,' they listen to me." Look at what God says about who we are. He says who we are—we are not by nature his sheep. We are by nature separated from him. By nature we are sinful. By nature, as we heard in our baptism service, we are born without true faith in God and true fear of God. We are born condemned to hell because we are sinners. But God changes that.

God is the one who speaks his voice to us and leads us to believe. He leads us to believe that Jesus lived perfectly in our place and died in our place and that this has eternal consequences for us. He has taken away our sins and now that changes us. We no longer want to live just for ourselves. We want to live for him who died for us and rose again. We **want** to do it. It's not that we have to do it. It's not that we have to fulfill some obligation to God and earn his love. We do it because he loved us first.

He answers the eternal questions—“My sheep listen to my voice because they know I **have** taken care of them. I **have** taken away their sin. They **are** forgiven.” That’s God’s answer to you and me. We have heard it and we have listened to it, but do we go through life and not listen. Are there times in life that other voices drown out the Shepherd’s voice in your ears and in my ears? Does the voice of the world around us which tells us it’s about keeping track, it’s about having the most toys, it’s about since you bought those toys you better use them, and you don’t have time then necessarily to listen to the Shepherd’s voice. Does that voice drown out our Good Shepherd’s voice?

Do we face difficulty and heartache, do we have problems in our relationships and we are so filled with bitterness and bile all the time that we can’t see God’s goodness around us? We are so upset with that other person. We are constantly digging at one another that we don’t see that we have a God who loves us and has taken away our sins that helps us to forgive as we have been forgiven because we are so busy carrying along with us and savoring the wrongs that are committed against us. We have heard his voice—“Forgive as you have been forgiven”—but do we always listen to that voice?

We have heard God say, “I am with you always to the very end of the age,” but as we go through some very difficult things in this world, Satan is going to be there telling us, “God isn’t there. He has deserted you. He doesn’t love you.” Do we listen then to our Shepherd’s voice as we face those difficulties? Or do we instead turn to the voice of a bottle, the voice of a pill, the voice of a drug, the voice of something to numb us to what hurts us instead of listening to our Shepherd’s voice which gives us the answer that nothing can separate us from his love that is in Christ Jesus?

Yes, we have heard and we have listened, but if we are honest with each other, we have to admit that there are times when we stop listening and listen instead to some other voices within us or from outside of us. When we do that, we have offended the God who lived and died in our place. We have said, “Yes, I believe you love me. But no, I don’t trust you in my daily life.” We have turned away from God and turned other ways, and we have all done it.

The absolutely amazing thing about our God is that he doesn’t savor the bitterness of his anger toward us. Instead he poured it all out on Christ. When Christ was on the cross, everything that you and I deserve because we listen to those other voices was poured out on Jesus. He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” so that you and I never have to. This is what is amazing. He loves us. This is the eternal answer that we have to hold on to. He loves us in spite of who we are and that leads us to want to serve him more faithfully in the future. It leads us to want to listen. It leads us to want to not just read the words and have them pass in front of our eyes, not just listen to maybe two-thirds of the sermon and then pat ourselves on the back as we manage to hear that much, but to apply it and listen to every one of the readings that we hear. Then we can apply it to our life and then we can chew on it as we go through our daily life and think back to how that fits what I am going through right now. What is God’s voice saying to me that is a help to me and a comfort to me and gives me confidence to face this hour?

That is how we listen to his voice. We dig into his voice. We chew on the Word. We make faithful use of the Sacraments so that he says to us, “I love you. I have clothed you in my righteousness at your baptism. I give you my body and blood in the Sacrament for your forgiveness. I am here for you.” That is where we find those answers. The answers that he gives us give us a confidence that goes beyond what this world can offer.

If our confidence had to be only in ourselves, we would have no confidence at all. You know what it’s like. You look in the mirror and you can see the imperfections in your face that no one else notices. You look in your life, and you see the imperfections that you hope no one else notices. If your confidence had to lie in your imperfection, you would have no confidence at all.

But here is what God says, “I hold them in my hand. They are my sheep. I hold them in my hand and not only me, the Father holds them, and no one can snatch them away from me.” Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. That is what God says to us over and over and over. He becomes very redundant in Scripture in repeating these promises to us because he knows, like sheep, we need constant care. We need constant oversight. We need constant protection. Because sometimes we are too oft to wander off on our own and forget that, so he repeats those truths to us over and over.

Here is the confidence—nothing can separate me from God. The only thing that can really separate me from God is if I stop listening to his voice, if I tune in to another channel, if I surround myself with other things so that I don’t hear of his love for me and I don’t let it touch my heart and move me, if I start taking it for granted because I am so desensitized to it or if I start chasing off in other areas. Then my confidence is gone, but nothing outside of me can separate me from God. He says, “Keep looking to me and I don’t care what you go through, I will help you through it.” That is God’s promise to you and me. That is a voice worth listening to.

It’s a voice worth listening to every day of our lives because it gives us a message of peace, of joy, of hope and of confidence.