

## Listening to Voices

*April 29, 2007*

(Easter 4 - Year C)

John 10: 22-30

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

When I was a little boy growing up, we didn't have very much furniture in our formal living room.

The living room was basically bare, with the exception of a mahogany table and a hi-fi stereo.

Back in those days, the hi-fi stereo was a huge piece of wooden furniture.

We used the stereo to play vinyl records, vinyl records which came in 2 different speeds, 33 1/3 or 45s.

One of my favorite things to do with my dad was to go into the living room, and we would get pillows, and lay on the floor and listen to music on the hi-fi stereo.

My dad had this collection of old records - a library of classical music. My dad and I would listen to these old, classical pieces and he would explain the music to me.

I believe that I gained my appreciation for classical music from these times of listening with my father.

To me, as a small boy, the music was just a bunch of sounds.

But, my dad would explain to me about the different voices and the instruments that we were listening to.

I can clearly remember us listening to the classic Russian piece called "Peter and the Wolf."

In "Peter and the Wolf," each character in the story is represented by a different musical instrument.

The wolf is represented by french horns,  
Peter is violins,

The bird is a flute,  
The duck - an oboe,  
The cat - a clarinet and  
Peter's grumpy old grandfather is a booming bassoon.

My father would teach me the story of Peter and the Wolf by teaching  
me to recognize the various voices.

He would say:  
"Listen! There's the bird!"  
And, I would ask:  
"How do you know it's the bird?"  
And, Dad would say:  
"Listen, listen....for the flute."

And, then Dad would make a scary face and say:  
"Listen...there's the bad wolf!"  
Do you hear the french horns?"

In our old living room, laying on the floor listening to the hi-fi stereo,  
my dad taught me to listen and discern voices.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says:  
"I am the good shepherd....  
My sheep hear my voice.  
I know them and they follow me."

Jesus is our good shepherd.  
And, we are his sheep.  
But, how do we hear his voice?

When I was a very little boy, I listened to my dad's old classical records,  
and the music just sounded like a bunch of sounds.  
But, when my dad began to explain the different instruments and the  
sounds they made, I began to hear the voices.

We, also, must be taught to listen for Jesus' voice.

We must be taught to listen and discern:  
To discern which voices belong to Jesus and which voices belong to the  
big, bad wolf.

The first step in listening for Jesus' voice seems pretty obvious:  
We have to listen.

However, in today's society, we leave very little room in our ears to  
listen for the voice of Jesus.

We wake up to an alarm clock, turn on the TV to listen to the Today  
Show, get in the car and talk on the cell phone, work in offices  
with muzak, come home and listen to CDs, then fall asleep  
listening to David Letterman.

Many of you know that I like to go to the gym to exercise and to pray.  
I have been tempted many, many times to get an iPod - so that I can  
listen to music while I work out.

But, if I had my ears plugged up with an iPod, I would block out the  
voice of Jesus, speaking to me in the sheer silence of my thoughts  
and prayers.

In listening for the voice of the Good Shepherd, we must leave space to  
listen.

Secondly, we hear and discern the voice of Jesus when we learn what  
Jesus' voice sounds like.

In Peter and the Wolf, the voice of the grandfather sounds like a bassoon  
and the voice of the duck sounds like an oboe.

And, *we* can learn what Jesus' voice sounds like through our experience  
and the reading of Scripture.

Jesus says in the Gospel of John:

“The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me.”

The voice of Jesus sounds like the works that Jesus does.  
And, other voices *do not* sound like Jesus and his works.

When we hear voices that sound of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, those voices are the voice of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

When we hear the sound of loved ones reuniting at the airport, that is the sound of Jesus' voice.

When we hear the sound of a husband saying "I am sorry" to his wife, that is the sound of Jesus' voice.

When we hear the sound of a sales clerk waiting patiently on an elderly customer, that is the sound of Jesus' voice.

Just as I discerned the voices of the characters in Peter and the Wolf by the sounds the instruments made,

We discern the voice of Jesus by how it sounds and how the voice compares to the work that Jesus does.

Lastly, the voice of Jesus leads us to places that we would not usually want to go to.

Most sheep would just as soon stay in the nice, green pasture they are used to.

But, the good shepherd leads his sheep through the valley of the shadow of death.

The good shepherd leads the sheep out of the comfort zone.

Many people will ask me how I was called to the priesthood.

And, the answer is that it was a voice.

A voice asked me, through the words of another person:

"Why aren't you a priest?"

Why haven't you followed God's call on your life?"

And that person's voice, I believe, was the voice of Jesus, leading me out of my comfort zone.

In one of Jesus' appearances after the Resurrection, the Risen Jesus tells Peter:

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<sup>1</sup> See Galatians 5:22

“When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.”<sup>2</sup>

Then, Jesus says to Peter:  
“Follow me.”

The good shepherd takes us where we do not wish to go.

For, the voice of Jesus leads us to people that are difficult to love.  
The voice of Jesus leads us to volunteer to read Scripture out loud in church, or asks us to boldly sing hymns in church when we can barely sing in the shower.

The voice of Jesus leads us to confront the big, bad wolf in our lives.

If you are wanting to listen for the voice of Jesus in your life, then ask yourself these 3 questions:

1. Am I really listening, by making a quiet place where Jesus can be heard?
2. Does the sound of the voice sound like the works of Jesus' life?
3. Does the voice lead me out of my comfort zone?

For, my father taught me how to discern the voices in Peter and the Wolf.

And we, also, must learn to listen for the voice of the Jesus.

For today, the voice of the good shepherd is saying to you:

“I love you.

“Now come, and follow me.”

AMEN.

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<sup>2</sup> John 21: 18b