

Gospel: John 10:22-30

Jesus responds to questions about his identity with the remarkable claim that he and the Father are one. Those who understand this are his sheep; they hear his voice, follow, and will never be snatched from his hand.

²²At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

²⁵Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; ²⁶but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰The Father and I are one.”

Now I am not asking for a show of hands, but how many here remember when there were three channels: ABC, CBS, NBC and then really kind of a fourth channel that you had to adjust your antenna to make it come in, a UHF channel to get that public station, that station often had a higher number than the 2 through 10 major network channels. And then along came cable and all the sudden the less than a handful channels, turned into 30 to 45 even 50 channels - my goodness what we could watch now. There wasn't near enough time to take it all in. ESPN - a station that would show sports 24 hours a day - unbelievable. But then soon came ESPN2 and three and so forth. And then there was satellite TV, a satellite dish, which at first was a huge thing that sat in people's front or backyard. Remember those - they were like 8 feet across. When satellite TV started the number of channels skyrocketed to the hundreds, and then now today, if we included streaming services and access to TVs and movies, Hulu, Apple TV, Google, and Netflix - it is unbelievable the amount of visual entertainment that is at our fingertips. Even think about news: How did you get your news 30, 40 years ago? The network had a nightly news broadcast that was half an hour that usually followed your local news. You could also tune to the radio, and you got your daily newspaper, and just maybe you subscribe to a magazine to hear about the news from other places. For most people this covered the highest majority of our news hearing. Once the nightly news was over, you didn't deal with news again until the next day. Communication basically consisted of the three TV networks, your favorite radio station, your local newspaper, and among family - when we sat down to craft, by our own hand writing, an actual letter that was sent in the mail. When was the last time you received a

handwritten letter in the mail? I'm not talking about invitations, thank you notes, or Mother's Day cards.

So, what about now? What about May of 2019? How many things come at us in various ways that they can command our attention? We have cell phones, we have iPads, tablets, and other handheld devices. We have computers, we have Podcasts, we have streaming, we have hundreds of television channels, we have social media of Instagram and Facebook, plus something new that was probably invented yet this morning. All these things are seeking and sometimes demanding our attention.

So, what gets our attention? What do we pay credence to? How do we hear things today – and what types of things do we hear? What things do we block out? What things do we readily let in? There are so many things competing for our focus, our attention and our loyalty, and that to hear them can be as simple as touching a screen or button, that we do not even need to leave our chair. Do we even know or experience silence anymore? So what messages, what voices are you hearing this day and what are their sources?

In our gospel text today as we back up into the life of Jesus, while still yet in this resurrection season, we come to a passage describing people gathering around Jesus and asking if he is indeed the Messiah. Jesus answers them: "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me." "My sheep hear my voice" so how are we hearing the voice of the resurrected Messiah this day? How are we, as a faithful sheep, hearing the voice of the shepherd in today's world, among the cacophony of things

around us. There are so many sources that clamor for our attention, that seek to whisper in our ear, that how do we know even what the voice of Jesus is calling us to be about today?

Where do we even allow ourselves to hear the voice of God, the will of God, or the direction of God? Can God's voice only come from the Bible, but then if that's true, who interprets that scripture passage? Do we listen for voices from our church, from a pastor, from a church leader, from a denomination, from a family member, where do we look to hear the voice of Jesus?

Because the truth of the matter is, that a factor of where we look to hear a message, is also a filter for how and what we will hear. Did you know that on social media applications, that as they collect your data from things that you are interested in, that they begin to shape and package things that you will see and hear according to your previous choices? Many know this, but many do not. In other words, they have algorithms, many of them, that sort through your media tendencies to package a presentation to you that they believe caters to your wants, desires, and needs. In other words, if you stay on Facebook long enough and interact with it for an extended period time, pretty soon all of what appears on your screen will be based on what interests you, and they will filter out what doesn't. This may sound great and perhaps has some advantages, but the bottom line is that what you are hearing and experiencing is not coming at you objectively anymore. It becomes very subjective, and in doing so it's very possible we are missing out on a balanced perspective on many issues. This is true for these types of things not only in terms of advertising, and other interests that come our way, but unfortunately, it also

true in how we can receive our news. Our news ends up being catered to our tastes, instead of being presented to us in a more objective style.

Sometimes this can happen in our faith life as well. We consciously, or more likely subconsciously, tune in to particular aspects of what we believe is spiritually correct and can tune out everything else. Pretty soon, maybe all that we hear is what we align ourselves with. Another way that this has been put is this: “If your God agrees with everything you think and do, then maybe it’s time to take another look at God. Because the reality is the God of the Bible, the God of the empty tomb, is always challenging and equipping people in different ways.

Not only is this true from the Easter event, in which someone who was dead is alive again, it is true in many areas of our faith walk. So, when Jesus says: “My sheep hear my voice...” How do we know? How do we know what is the voice of Jesus? What is the voice of God’s truth? Perhaps the answer comes in many forms and in many ways. Perhaps all that work is the Holy Spirit’s work. However, I do believe there are some litmus tests that we can apply to the voices we are hearing to discover and recover what is authentic. With apologies to Jeff Foxworthy, I will put it like this: If nothing is challenging you to stretch and grow, that might be a red flag. If God agrees with you on everything that you think about life and politics, that might be a red flag. If you haven’t changed your opinion about something in the past 25 years that might be a red flag. If you haven’t wrestled with something that God has put in front of you for quite a while, that might be a red flag. If you haven’t actually opened a Bible to read what Jesus’ voice may be saying to you, that might be a red flag. If you are certain what everyone else needs to do to make the world a more faithful place, that might be a red flag.

The story of the New Testament people is a story of people who made sacrifices, who were challenged beyond their imagination, who were stretched beyond belief, as they sought to understand and live out this new way as modeled by Jesus, as witnessed by Jesus, as spoken by Jesus. This witness and voice did not end with the last nail was put in the cross, it did not end with the tomb was sealed, and it did not end when the ink dried on the last book of the Bible. The voice of the risen Savior is still alive and still speaking to us. What will we hear? What will we see? What will we do? How does the Easter event change us? Amen.