

# The Good Shepherd

May 12, 2019

Pastor Tom Ford

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

Pasadena, California

## John 10:

[22] At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter,

[23] and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon.

[24] So 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."

[25] Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me;

[26] but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.

[27] My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

[28] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

[29] What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.

[30] The Father and I are one."

\*\*\*

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Risen Christ!

One Sunday a young Pastor was giving a children's sermon about the 23rd Psalm. He told the children about sheep, that they weren't smart and needed lots of guidance, and that a shepherd's job was to stay close to the sheep, protect them from wild animals and keep them from wandering off and doing dumb things that would get them hurt or killed.

He pointed to the little children in the room and said that they were the sheep and needed lots of guidance.

Then the minister put his hands out to the side, palms up in a dramatic gesture, and with raised eyebrows said to the children, "If you are the sheep then who is the shepherd?" He was pretty obviously indicating himself.

A silence of a few seconds followed. Then a young visitor said, "Jesus: Jesus is the shepherd."

**Interim Pastor Tom Ford**



Hill Ave Grace  
Lutheran Church



The young Pastor, obviously caught by surprise, said to the young visitor, "Well then, who am I?"

The visitor frowned thoughtfully and then said with a shrug, "I guess you must be a sheep dog."

Sometimes I feel like a sheep dog. And I think that's how many pastors feel sometimes. The image being that of an animal running about frantically trying to bring together into one happy herd sheep scattered in all sorts of directions, each having a mind of his or her own, sometimes with an ego to match, and quite capable of zigging when you want him or her to zag. And zagging when you hope for a zig.

So, maybe we all, sheep and shepherd or sheepdog, as it sometimes is, need to take a little breather this morning from all the frantic comings and goings, the ziggings and zagging, of all our fast-paced, fear-filled, anxious lives and on this Good Shepherd Sunday listen for The Good Shepherd's voice, a voice we all want to recognize. A voice that speaks Good News to and for each of us. A voice that speaks clearly identifying who is who, calling us each by name. A voice that indeed calls each of us and invites us, each one, to follow all the way to abundant life.

The problem, however, is that we can't always make out the Good Shepherd's voice from among all those voices that are speaking to and around and from behind and in front of and from above and below us. Competing voices. Who is speaking?

Several years ago a woman awoke in the middle of the night to desperate, cries of "Help! Help!" Thinking that her husband was in distress, she shook him violently. Then, realizing that he was asleep, she got out of bed, headed into the living room where the shouting intensified. "Where are you?" she called out. "In the fireplace," was the reply. There, dangling in the fireplace flue, was a burglar stuck upside down. Police and firefighters eventually freed the would-be thief, but only after dismembering some brickwork and ripping out the mantle. The best part of the story may be what the homeowner did while waiting for help. She turned on the living room lights and sat down to record the sight with her video camera. Who knows what the two discussed at 2 A.M.? Perhaps she gave him a stern reading of John 10:1:--"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, is a thief and "a bandit."<sup>1</sup>

Not every voice we hear is the Good Shepherd's voice. And I'm not talking about just the voices in society. I'm also talking about the voices within our own hearts and minds. Voices that speak about little things. What shall I buy her for Mother's Day? Voices that speak about great things. How shall I answer if he asks me to marry him? What is important? What isn't important? Voices that speak about money and sex and politics and drugs and alcohol and smoking and raising children and caring for the

---

<sup>1</sup> Lindy Black, Sermon Nuggets, <http://home.twcny.rr.com/lyndale/Easter4A.htm>

**Interim Pastor Tom Ford**



**Hill Ave Grace**  
Lutheran Church



elderly and going or not going to war and ordaining or not ordaining and gay or lesbian persons. Voices that speak about the Mid-East? About same sex marriages? About hunger and HIV in Africa? Voices that speak about health and life-style changes? Voices that speak about out-of-control consumerism and the tendency we have to seek our own happiness without regard to what is moral - without regard for the needs of others. Voices that speak about what I could be doing in the church that I'm not doing now. Voices that speak about what I could be giving that I'm not giving now. Voices that speak about that old grudge I've been nurturing all this time and that maybe it's time to let it go. Voices that speak about old hurt feelings and why I'm still holding on to them. Voices that saturate the airwaves yelling, "Vote for me." Voices. All these and many many other voices.

Is it the voice of The Good Shepherd or is it another voice?

A famous actor was once the guest of honor at a social gathering where he received many requests to recite favorite excerpts from various literary works. An old preacher who happened to be there asked the actor to recite the Twenty-Third Psalm. The actor agreed on the condition that the preacher would also recite it. The actor's recitation was beautifully intoned with great dramatic emphasis for which he received lengthy applause. The preacher's voice was rough and broken from many years of preaching, and his diction was anything but polished. But when he finished there was not a dry eye in the room. When someone asked the actor what made the difference, he replied, "I know the psalm, but he knows the Shepherd."<sup>2</sup>

The Good Shepherd said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me ...."<sup>3</sup>

How do we tell? One of you believes The Good Shepherd is telling us that the church should bless same sex marriages? Another of you believes The Good Shepherd is telling us we should only bless opposite sex marriages? Which is the voice of The Good Shepherd?

We do not each always hear the voice of The Good Shepherd in the same way. Since that is more often than not the case, what are we to do?

Canadian Pastor Richard J. Fairchild answers: "The important thing is not that we come up with 'THE ANSWER' but that in listening and struggling with the issues in our lives and in the life of our [world] that we live the answers that we already have been given by our Shepherd....like these given by the Holy Spirit to the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Thessalonian Church: God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we

---

<sup>2</sup> Lindy Black, Sermon Nuggets, <http://home.twcny.rr.com/lyndale/Easter4A.htm>

<sup>3</sup> John 10:27

**Interim Pastor Tom Ford**



**73 N. Hill Avenue • Pasadena, CA 91106 • 626-792-4169 • [www.hillavenuegrace.org](http://www.hillavenuegrace.org)**

are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. Live in peace with each other... Encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Our Shepherd's voice is clear about how we should live and act. It is clear about what our attitude should be to those who are both our friends and those who we might regard as our enemies. And if we have trouble figuring out just what the Shepherd is trying to tell us about the big issues within our families - and our society and our world - we cannot go wrong by doing those things that the Shepherd has already told us to do in a clear and obvious way - and trusting that no matter what - no matter what the valley of the shadow of death we are wandering in is like - no matter what dangers surround us - that if we keep on following the voice we already know - the voice we have already heard - that our shepherd will keep us safe and bring us to God's house where we will be able to dwell forevermore. If we persist in listening to and following the voice of our Shepherd in the little things, the things that relate to how we ought to love God and how we ought to love one another and if we devote ourselves as did the first church after the day of Pentecost, to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, then we will discover an ever increasing clarity within us about what God is saying and about what God wants us to do; and we will discover too an ever increasing sense of peace among us and within us, a peace that endures - even when thieves and robbers try to steal it away, a peace that brings praise and glory to our God because of what others see in us. And that, my friends, is no small potatoes in a world in which peace - peace between nations and peoples - and peace in the inner hearts of men and women everywhere is a rare commodity."<sup>4</sup>

The Good Shepherd said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me ...."

The voice of The Good Shepherd is nothing less than the voice of Love. We've heard it many times before. We can recognize it anytime we listen with our hearts. It is solely the voice to follow.

Before we sing about it, let me close with two illustrations. If one doesn't amplify the voice of Love, maybe the other one will.

Russian Poet Yegveny Yevtushenko's autobiography tells how, in Moscow in 1941, Stalin thought to get some action going to energize the war effort against Nazi Germany. He tells of an event when the streets were lined with people, mostly women, waiting for a great parade of German prisoners who had been captured in the battle for Stalingrad. The atmosphere of hatred was palpable. Nearly every woman had lost husband, father, brother or son, and now was their chance to desecrate the symbols of

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Fairchild, "The Shepherd's Voice"  
<http://www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/a-ea04su.php>

**Interim Pastor Tom Ford**



**Hill Ave Grace**  
Lutheran Church



**73 N. Hill Avenue • Pasadena, CA 91106 • 626-792-4169 • [www.hillavenuegrace.org](http://www.hillavenuegrace.org)**

those who had killed their men folk. The flock had been gathered to vent its anger and hurt...to find solace in some kind of revenge.

The Germans came into view "... thin, unshaven, wearing dirty bloodstained bandages, hobbling on crutches or leaning on the shoulders of their comrades ... the streets became dead silent. An old woman pushed through the crowd, past the police cordon and, taking something from her coat, pushed it into the pocket of an exhausted soldier - a crust of black bread. And now suddenly from every side women were running towards the soldiers, pushing into their hands bread, cigarettes, whatever they had. The soldiers were no longer enemies. They were people."<sup>5</sup> These soldiers of the enemy were also men and boys, husbands, brothers and sons.

Even in the most extreme circumstances...the shepherd's voice is discerned in the brave act of one person which can rally us to transcend our anger and our fear and act not with vengeance, but with compassion. And love.

And, in closing, illustration number two: For years St. Anthony's Catholic Church in San Francisco has served meals to people in need. Over the doorway to its dining room the church has posted a sign bearing the inscription: Caritate Dei.

One day a young mechanic, just released from jail and new to St. Anthony's, entered the door and sat down for a meal. A woman was busy cleaning the adjoining table. "When do we get on our knees and do the chores, lady?" he asked. "You don't," she replied. "Then when's the sermon comin'?" he inquired. "Aren't any," she said. "How `bout the lecture on life, huh?" "Not here," she said.

The man was suspicious. "Then what's the gimmick?" The woman pointed to the inscription over the door. He squinted at the sign. "What's it mean, lady?" "Out of love for God," she said with a smile, and moved on to another table.<sup>6</sup>

Now, let's sing about it! "The King of Love My Shepherd Is."

**AMEN**

---

<sup>5</sup> Yegveny Yevtushenko, *Almost at the End* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1987) p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Marty in "The Door To Abundant Life", *Christian Century*, April 17, 1996.

**Interim Pastor Tom Ford**



**73 N. Hill Avenue • Pasadena, CA 91106 • 626-792-4169 • [www.hillavenuegrace.org](http://www.hillavenuegrace.org)**