

WILL YOU FOLLOW ME?

5/3/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (Livestreamed)
Easter 4 (A): Psalm 23; Acts 2:42-47; John 10:1-10 (CEB)

How often do you accidentally call a loved one by someone else's name? I know parents do it all the time—calling one kid by their sibling's name. I did it to one of my cats recently! I'm so used to saying, "Alexa, turn on some Nora Jones music," or "Alexa, turn up the volume," or "Alexa, turn off," that the other day when my cat, Clementine, jumped up on the counter, I called out, "Alexa! Get down!"

And, even though we intellectually understand it's not intentional, when someone calls us by the wrong name, it can make us feel like, "Geez. You don't even know me." Knowing someone's name makes a big difference. And being called by that name strengthens the relationship.

In today's reading from John, we're told that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows each of us by name. Not only does God know our name, God uses our name to call us as we recognize God's voice. The twist in this passage is that we typically refer to sheep as not the smartest of animals, but here we're told sheep are smart enough to distinguish between their shepherd's voice and someone else's.

Back in Middle School, I raised a lamb for a 4-H project, and she knew her name. I think I've talked about her before. Her name was Daisy (those of you who know me are going to think I name all my pets Daisy, but I promise my video-loving kitty and this lamb have been the only Daisies in my life).

Daisy the sheep was lucky because she didn't have to go to the 4-H fair in the fall and be sold. Instead, she was returned to the flock at my Great Uncle's ranch, where she lived out her days. Because she would come running when Uncle Bob called her name, Daisy became invaluable! Rather than having to work hard to get a couple of sheep moving from the pasture to the barn, all he had to do was call Daisy, she would start heading toward him and all the other sheep would follow.

Like Daisy the sheep, who then had an important role on the ranch, those who are called by name in scripture are given certain responsibilities when God calls them by name. People like Moses, Abraham and Sarah, Samuel, Martha—just to name a few—were called by name, and then given an important role.

The hymn we sang last week described the implications of being called by God. The lyrics ask: "Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around through ~~my~~ [God's] sight and touch and sound?"

During this time of "Stay Home; Stay Safe", it can feel like there's not much we're able to do, in terms of reshaping the world, but we are doing the most loving thing, showing the world we believe taking care of the most vulnerable by staying home, and keeping others safe. Rather than doing what we individually prefer, we are sacrificing for the greater good. And we're watching those efforts make a difference. God called us by name, and we responded.

At the same time, Jesus cautions us to beware of thieves who actually don't know our names. These thieves will steal attention away from God. Instead of shepherding us into beneficial roles, these voices will tempt us with mis-leading promises of safety, security and personal gain that have nothing to do with the kingdom of God.

And, yet, those same lyrics ask, “Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?”, reminding us our faith journey is not about sheltering in our traditions, and never trying anything new, but going to new places in our worship and fellowship that expands our ability to create access for more and more people to experience God’s love in new ways, and as we do so, we, ourselves, are transformed.

As we move forward as a parish family, heeding the guidelines of our Bishop and Governor, creating a slow and phased re-opening process, we’ll be listening to where God is calling us. I’m thinking of calling our re-opening Task Force, something like the “GRO Task Force. “G” for grace-filled, “R” for realistic (in terms of following recommended precautions), and “O” for opening. But, primarily GRO as in “g-r-o-w”, because we are called to be transformed as we follow God’s voice, and believe me, God is calling each of us—every single one of us—by name.

As we listen, we serve others, and become the Good Shepherds for each other. So, in the coming week, let us also express gratitude for those in our neighborhood, state and country who have been shepherding us. They are serving as God’s hands, feet and voice in the world: teachers who are scrambling to create online courses; doctors, nurses and other medical professionals on the front-lines of this pandemic, community leaders who are advocating for equity in stimulus and health care packages, and so many others. They are the Good Shepherds among us.

But lest we forget, today’s Gospel also assures us that we are being called by name to learn, to grow to stretch, so that...so that we contribute to and experience life being lived to the fullest. Jesus says, “I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.”

God wants our lives to be filled with Divine abundance. So, the hymn continues, “I’ll move and live and grow in you and you in me”. In other words, when we answer God’s call, God is with us...moving and living and growing in us, and we in God.

And so we answer: “Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.”

-AMEN

Readings (*Common English Bible Translation*)

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd.

I lack nothing.

He lets me rest in grassy meadows;

he leads me to restful waters;

he keeps me alive.

He guides me in proper paths

for the sake of his good name.

Even when I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no danger because you are with me.

Your rod and your staff—
they protect me.
You set a table for me
right in front of my enemies.
You bathe my head in oil;
my cup is so full it spills over!
Yes, goodness and faithful love
will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will live in the LORD's house
as long as I live.

Acts 2:42-47

The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

John 10:1-10

I assure you that whoever doesn't enter into the sheep pen through the gate but climbs over the wall is a thief and an outlaw. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The guard at the gate opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Whenever he has gathered all of his sheep, he goes before them and they follow him, because they know his voice. They won't follow a stranger but will run away because they don't know the stranger's voice." Those who heard Jesus use this analogy didn't understand what he was saying.

So Jesus spoke again, "I assure you that I am the gate of the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and outlaws, but the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.