

Following the Voice

When they train people to detect counterfeit money – they don't spend their time looking at all the different examples of fake money – rather, they spend their time looking at that which is genuine. Being trained to see that which is authentic – makes the “less than authentic” money stand out. The deviations, the flaws, become obvious.

The same could be said for the true voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. As St. John writes: “The sheep hear [the shepherd's] voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out ... he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

For the last four years Anderson and Miles have spent a lot of time listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. They have spent a lot of time hearing, studying, and discussing the Word of God. And, they have spent a lot of time hearing, studying, memorizing, and reciting the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther.

In our Catechesis classes, we begin with a Scripture reading – and then we move on to the part of the Small Catechism that corresponds to that teaching. As we do, we're listening to see if what Dr. Luther writes – is the same voice that we hear in Holy Scripture.

“Boys, don't swallow what Dr. Luther – or what I say – hook, line, and sinker.” If there are things that don't sound right – that raise a red flag – don't ignore it. In a little bit they will confess that they believe what the Small Catechism teaches – because it agrees with the Bible – because it is the same voice, the same teaching, as that of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

You know the Shepherd's voice. “You shall have no other gods.” “When you pray, say, Our Father who art in heaven ...” “Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” “Take eat, this is my body ... drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the

forgiveness of sins.” “It is finished.” “Whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life.”

So that you may follow the Good Shepherd, Jesus gives you a father and a mother – He gives you a pastor (which literally means, “a shepherd”) – and He gives you other people to guide and lead you. The words they speak may not be the same, but you can still recognize the voice of your Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Language like – “the First Article of the Creed confessed God the Father and the work of Creation” – is very familiar to you. “Where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.” These may be the words of man – but they confess the truth of God’s Word – they are the voice of the Shepherd.

But there are other voices – others who want you to follow them. Voices that say, “you will be like God.” Voices that say – it’s okay to steal that Snickers bar, they have plenty of them. Voices that say – “son, it’s okay with God if you don’t go to church.”

Such voices should raise red flags for you. You should immediately realize that these are counterfeits – fake, false, lies – words that are contrary to God. And you should believe what the Lord says about such a person – that they are a thief and a robber – that they come to “steal and kill and destroy.” Do not follow strange voices.

Again, you’ve heard me say many, many times that – the salvation equation is – “Jesus=salvation.” If you hear another equation – that “Jesus + (something) = salvation” – flee from that voice. If God’s love for you is qualified – that God loves you IF, or WHEN – or, God forgives you IF or WHEN or UP TO A CERTAIN POINT – that is not the voice of your Shepherd. Flee!

Flee – run away – as if your life depends on it – because it does. How does Jesus put it? “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

Soon Anderson and Miles will make promises before God Himself, and before all of you. And they will be asked this question: “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?”

They are not promising that they will remain members of Immanuel Lutheran Church until they die – but they are promising to continue to follow Jesus Christ. They are confessing that what the Small Catechism teaches is a correct teaching of Holy Scripture – that it is the same voice as the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

It is the voice that they – and all of us should follow – for Jesus has come that you might have abundant life. Jesus comes, and with His “I forgive you” – He sets you free from all your sin with its guilt and shame. Jesus comes so that hearing His voice – you may follow Him through this life – and in the life that has no end.

May God keep you steadfast in the true faith, unto life everlasting.

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!