

“They Know His Voice”

If you’ve ever been lost in a store as a little child – you know how that feeling rocks you, makes you unstable, as if the world is spinning. The elderly person with dementia issues knows what that’s like – sitting behind the wheel, no idea where you are just lost.

When the child hears the voice of Dad or Mom, he goes running towards the voice with all the anxiety left in his tracks. For the elderly person, the sight of something familiar calms the nerves as the world starts to come back into order, and with paralysis past, the car is pointed in the right direction.

In this world there is the danger of getting lost. There are many voices out there – some are familiar, some are strange. Some seek to steal and kill and destroy – but ONE leads you in God’s kingdom, into green pastures and beside still waters – ONE voice nourishes and strengthens you, giving you abundant life.

In the chapter just before our Gospel reading for today – Jesus heals a man who was born blind. In that account, the voice of the Pharisees (religious leaders) – said that Jesus is not from God – that He is a sinner.

The blind man’s parents listen to the voice of the Pharisees – and they distance themselves from their own son, and from Jesus – afraid of being thrown out of the synagogue.

Jesus’ voice shows that He has come to give life – to heal this man’s blindness – to give him faith that trusts His Word – to give him abundant life.

Confirmands, you have heard the voice of Jesus – you have studied His Word so that you may follow Him. However, you are surrounded by many voices, aren’t you? It’s easy to become LOST in all of this – shaken, afraid, paralyzed, as if you are walking blind in the darkness.

And you have heard the voice of the Good Shepherd Jesus – who calls you by name – who goes with you – “and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.”

In this world, who are you going to listen to? Who are you going to follow? And what will be the results? Those are big questions for young people to have to consider – and that’s why Jesus is with you – to shepherd you.

As you go through life – in the midst of all the voices – ask yourself, “Is it a familiar voice, or does it sound funny?” Is it familiar language, or strange?

Think about the language that is familiar to you. “Divine Service” (that God Himself is here, serving you). God’s Word of Law and His Word of Gospel. Sacraments (mysteries!). God’s grace is His “undeserved love.” The Third Article of the Creed confesses God the Holy Spirit and the work of Sanctification. Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness.

How about this language – is it familiar? Multi-sensory worship experience. You can have your best life now. How does this make you feel? Make a decision for Jesus.

Again, is it familiar or strange language? The real question is – is it the voice of God, or not? That’s what matters. You can’t get away from the voices – and they are all beckoning you to follow them. But you know the voice of the Good Shepherd – and you know that He comes to give you what is “good” for you.

What does the Good Shepherd say? Does His voice talk about sin? “The wages of sin is death.” “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Does the voice speak forgiveness? “This is for you ... for the forgiveness of sins.” “God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Like the Early Church in our reading from Acts – as followers of Jesus Christ – you Confirmands will soon promise to be “devoted” to God, to His Word and Sacraments – promising to continue to gather with His communion of saints. This is the green pasture into which the Good Shepherd leads you. This is where Christ meets you – to give you life – so that you may “have it abundantly.”

But don't be misled – following Jesus (being a Christian) is not always easy. As the Epistle says – “For to this you have been called” – to suffer for doing good. The question is – in good times, and in times of suffering – who are you going to listen to?

The voices that say – God is paying you back for all the evil you've done – Obviously God doesn't love you or you wouldn't be suffering like this – You'd better get busy trying to make things right with God.

Or, will you listen to that familiar voice that you know? “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves ... if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins ...”

The voice of the Good Shepherd says that suffering for doing good “is a gracious thing” – because it shows that you are following Him. Following the voice of Jesus, who suffered for you – and who leads you through death and the grave to life everlasting – to abundant life, now and eternally. The voice of the Good Shepherd who promises: “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.”

Dearly beloved – come, let us follow Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]