

It is Your declared will, heavenly Father, that all men should learn to know Your mercy, grace and salvation, which has been made known to us through Your Son, our Good Shepherd. Give us faithful pastors who truly care for Your sheep speaking Your Word faithfully to us and protect us from all hirelings by enabling us always to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd following Him alone unto life everlasting. Amen.

[Jesus said:] "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, 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." This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what He was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

In Christ Jesus, whose tender voice is recognized and gladly followed by His sheep all the way to our everlastingly green pastures and quiet waters, dear fellow redeemed:

We live in a day when speech and voice recognition have been developed for such things as the ease of taking notes electronically, hands free texting and for security measures. There is a difference: speech recognition is the process of converting speech to digital data, voice recognition is aimed toward identifying the person who is speaking. On Easter Jesus' voice was recognized by Mary Magdalene, when He tenderly spoke her name, so that she no longer mistook Him for the gardener.

Now you and I do not hear Jesus' voice directly today, but He has established the office of the pastoral ministry so that His under-shepherds are called by Him to speak His words faithfully. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, spoke of this Good Shepherd speech recognition in this way: "Let the prophet ... who has my word speak my word faithfully." Only our Good Shepherd speaks the pure and unadulterated Gospel. All false gods and their prophets may have words that come close to Gospel-sounding, but never is eternal life given to their hearers without condition.

So let us review this truth and put it into practice as our Lord desires: **Trust Your Good Shepherd's Voice/Speech Recognition.**

### I

As we heard in our Gospel lesson the Good Shepherd tells us: "I know my sheep", we are not mere numbers to Him or worse yet indistinguishable bleating sheep lost to Him in His large flock – He personally knows us and all our needs, in truth as He says in our text: "He calls His own sheep by name." Have you ever made an acquaintance with someone who is held in high regard by many including yourself and then as some time goes by and you have a passing encounter with that person again and you are called by name? How did that make you feel? Honored? Special? Cared for?

Our Good Shepherd knows us personally and knows our every need even before we ask. Now there are times when our Lord's under-shepherds are expected to have that level of knowledge and a complaint may be registered that the pastor did not show up to visit a certain member when in the hospital, but then no one ever informed him. Our pastors are trained to show care for the sheep of the Good Shepherd ready at all times to speak the Word of God faithfully, so that the sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. However, pastors are not blessed with omniscience.

The thief and the robber have a different agenda "they come to steal and kill and destroy." The sheep are vulnerable to being fleeced, butchered and forsaken by the hireling who does not own the sheep. Jesus warns about such false prophets repeatedly throughout Scripture and He knows how vulnerable we can be. The false prophet will declare things that not only sound close to the truth, but will offer things our old sinful natures desire. Health and wealth preachers today tend to be popular since they promise good health and abundant wealth if you follow their guidance in how to follow Jesus in this life. While the sheep are tricked to find these supposed "greener" pastures, they are being groomed to be fleeced and fattened up to be butchered only for the false prophet's gain.

It is not peculiar for pastors to hear request for more law preaching, not quite that bluntly. But the request is asking for more direction how to live holier lives. Yet if explored further it has more to do with prescriptions of holy living for others. Or to pound away at the gross outbursts of sin found in the world. It is rare to have a request for more personally convicting law, which is the only kind of law that should be preached to the sheep, so that the healing balm of the Gospel might be a great relief.

We recently heard of such a despicable agenda in the passion account of our Lord by the chief priests and elders who paid Judas 30 pieces of silver. When Judas returned to them seeking the peace of forgiveness, they refused to take back the money and told Judas to take care of his guilt and shame himself. No forgiveness was offered.

## II

But not so with the Good Shepherd. Our beloved Lord Jesus “came that [His sheep] may have life and have it abundantly.” But how can we know that we are following the Good Shepherd and not a thief, robber, or a wolf in sheep’s clothing? He promises us that we know His voice. You might object and say: “But I do not know the Bible that well, and since so much of it is a matter of personal interpretation, how can I really know what is the truth?”

The Apostle Peter remarks about the miracle of Scripture’s inspiration with these words: “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” If Holy Scriptures were a collection of men’s thoughts about God, it would be unreliable and up for personal interpretation. But since it is the very Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is reliable and knowable. Why would a loving God give us His Word that would only confuse and mislead?

Now it is true we all have varying degrees of knowledge of Scripture as Christians, but we have all been instructed to recognize the basic truths, which the Bible underscores throughout. So when we hear what sounds like the Gospel of salvation in Christ and such things are added like: *“... but now you have to do such and such to add to Jesus’ work to be saved”* or *“Jesus did save everyone, but we must personally decide to make Him Lord of our Life”*, red flags indicating the lies of directing sinners to their own works and actions should pop up for you and you should reject such hireling speak.

I remember as a boy making the observation when we got new pastors that the new voices were different, perhaps too nasally, too fast, too soft, too deep, too slow, too loud, too bold, too timid. Eventually I stopped noticing those differences; we were once again hearing the same message from the Good Shepherd as we had heard before. It was not the sound of the voice, but the blessed content.

Your ears, which you have right now, will not hear the actual voice of the Good Shepherd until the day your body is raised from the dead. But the content of Jesus’ speech will be the same as you have been hearing from His faithful under-shepherds in this life. He will say to you: “Come, you have been blessed by the Father, receive

the inheritance prepared for you since the creation of the world.” There will be no red flags that pop up in those words. Salvation will be spoken of as pure gift from God to you for Jesus’ sake.

You recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd even though you have not had first-hand encounters with the sound of His actual voice. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for you, by becoming the Lamb of God. He knows your every sin of thought, word and deed for which He bled and died. He knows you that intimately and calls you by Your name as His dear sheep of His flock, redeemed, restored, forgiven.

We will soon be bidding farewell to an under-shepherd who has labored among us for 25 years, Pastor Ring and will be welcoming another supplied to us by the Good Shepherd, Pastor Sparley. Listen to the voice and trust that when you hear the unconditional forgiveness of all your sins and the declaration that you stand right and holy before God for Jesus’ sake alone dressed in His everlasting righteousness, that you are hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd.

If your Good Shepherd’s voice grows increasingly faint for you through neglect of hearing it on a regular basis, my fellow sheep of His flock, you will be vulnerable to the lying voices of the thieves, robbers and hirelings out there. The Good Shepherd keeps you safe, safe for all eternity, through His voice in this life. He speaks and you are saved. He who has ears let him hear. Amen.