

Stephen R. Shaver

Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

April 21, 2024

4 Easter, Year B, Revised Common Lectionary

[Acts 4:5-12](#)

[Psalm 23](#)

[1 John 3:16-24](#)

[John 10:11-18](#)

+ + +

I wonder who are all the people whose voice you would recognize instantly if you heard them say your name?

I remember a time, maybe 20 or 25 years ago, before the rise of cell phones and caller ID, when the phone would ring, and you would pick it up, not knowing who was on the other end, and say hello; and sometimes the other person would say, “Hi, it’s me.” And you would know who it was, because it was someone you loved, or a good friend. It was a kind of sign of intimacy, to be able to know each other just by voice print, by the particular audio spectrum of those three little words: “Hi, it’s me.” And then of course there were those awkward moments where maybe you weren’t quite as close friends as the other person thought, or you just couldn’t access your mental voice database in time, and you had to say, “Uh, sorry, who’s this?”

That hasn't happened to me in a long time. These days when our phone rings we might look to see who it is, and if it's from an unknown number we might just let it go to voicemail, knowing it's likely to be a sales pitch or worse yet a scammer. We might text each other instead of calling, and even if we want to talk on the phone we might send a text first, "Got a minute to talk?" But voices still matter. I know of folks who have voicemails from loved ones who have since died, and who from time to time still pull up those old voicemails just to hear that familiar, beloved voice print once more.

I wonder what Jesus' voice sounded like. I wonder if he was a high tenor like me or a deep bass or something else entirely. I wonder if it was thin and reedy or rich and resonant. What did his friends hear when they listened to his voice? We might get sentimental and imagine he had the most beautiful voice in the world, a radio announcer voice or a crooner voice, but I doubt it. We believe Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine, and being divine didn't juice up his humanity into a kind of Superman; didn't make him the best athlete in the world or the handsomest supermodel, and there's no reason to think it made him some kind of Bing Crosby or James Earl Jones in the voice department either. We say as a human being he was without sin, which means not that he was some kind of perfect specimen of physical and psychological perfection, as if such a thing existed, but that he was fully and completely himself and fully and completely aligned with God's purposes. So who knows what his voice sounded like.

But we sure know that people heard it, and they listened to him.

To the first disciples fishing by the Sea of Galilee, he said, "Follow me," and they did. They knew the voice of the shepherd, and they followed him.

When Lazarus was lying dead in the tomb, he shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man heard the voice of the shepherd, and he came out to him.

When Mary Magdalene was weeping outside the empty tomb of Jesus and he appeared to her, she didn’t know him at first by sight. She thought he was the gardener, until he opened his mouth and called her by her name. One word he said: “Mary.” And she knew the voice of the shepherd, and she followed him.

Jesus tells us today that he is the good shepherd, that his own sheep know him and trust him because they know the sound of his voice, and also because *he* knows *them*. “I know my own and my own know me.” And they know one more thing. Not only is the good shepherd familiar *to* them; not only do they know he is familiar *with* them; they also know how far he will go *for* them. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep,” Jesus says. This is no hired hand. This is no thief or bandit, no wolf in sheep’s clothing, no sales pitch or scammer. This is the voice of someone who loves us, a voice that makes our heart leap when we hear it.

And it’s because of that love and trust that we can follow this shepherd wherever he leads. Because sometimes the path feels safe and friendly, but sometimes it may not. The shepherd leads the sheep out of the fold and out into a big world where there are green pastures and still waters, but there are also dark places. There is also the valley of the shadow of death. Following this shepherd might involve risk, and adventure, and uncertainty, and loss. The promise is not that there will be no shadow of death but that even there the shepherd is with us and we will be comforted.

We don't get to hear Jesus's voice in the same way his first friends did. Not physically, with sound waves from his vocal cords bouncing off our eardrums. But we can hear it still. Sometimes we hear it from this lectern, in the words of scripture, as we read them out loud to each other week after week. Sometimes we hear it from this table as he says to us again, "This is my body that is given for you, do this in remembrance of me." Sometimes we might hear it in prayer and discernment, individually or together, as we wrestle for God's will in our lives and listen hard for where the shepherd is leading us. Sometimes it might even seem to be coming from very, very far away, and we might not be able to be sure whether it's the shepherd's voice we're hearing or something else, and we might not know what direction it's coming from, and we might be lost; and in those moments we can remember the promise of the shepherd with 100 sheep who will never rest until the one single lost one is found, who is coming for us and will bring us safely home.

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Announcements

- Welcome Center/gift shop; taking orders for Mother's Day corsages
- Final Imagine Incarnation workshop today 12-2
- Thursday, 4/25, 12pm: Holy Eucharist for St. Mark's Day
- Fearless Faith Revival Sat; seeking carpools for 3 people; Bill Glenn
- Sunday Forum off, resumes 5/12