

Sermon: John 10:22-30 (Easter 4C)
25 April 2010, Christ Church Riverdale, Bronx NY
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John 10:22 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah,^b tell us plainly." ²⁵Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; ²⁶but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.^c ³⁰The Father and I are one." (NRSV)

"My sheep hear my voice. . . ." The type of shepherding done in Jesus' day still survives in parts of the Middle East. At dawn, a large group of sheep is gathered together in a sheepfold. Several herds stay there overnight protection against predators and so that some of the shepherds can sleep. Then during the day they go with their individual shepherds to find grazing land in the hills. Every morning you can see the sheepfold gradually start to empty, as lines of sheep stream out in maybe a dozen directions, moving toward the hills. As you get closer, you can hear how this chaos turns into order. The shepherds call out their sheep; the sheep hear their own shepherd's voice, know it, and follow their shepherd every day. This is the kind of shepherding Jesus was talking about, where the sheep hear, know, and follow.

Yet there are some shepherds who betray that trust: Isidro Bolaños, pastor in Brooklyn claimed to have received a huge grant and was hiring, hiring, hiring--luring hundreds to sign up with promises of jobs paying up to \$11,000 per month. He gathered their Social Security numbers, copies of their passports, and other personal information, all the while promising paychecks and benefits that have never materialized. In the meantime, the organizations he claimed gave him the grants either haven't heard of him or appear not to exist, and the shepherd left the country for a "mission trip." The apparent swindle is made all the more tragic in this recession because some declined real job offers or even resigned their current job to sign up with the pastor.¹

If Jesus had lived in a time and place like ours, more familiar with electronic devices than with sheep and shepherds he might have used the image of a radio. "[We] need to tune into the right station. Filtering out the other voices that fill the airwaves can

¹ "Brooklyn Pastor's Job Offers: From Blessing to Curse," *The New York Times* (23 April 2010), A21.

help us find God's message."² I don't know what your favorite radio stations are, but I listen to National Public Radio a lot. When I'm traveling, it can be a challenge to find NPR--the stations can be kind of far apart and the signals aren't the strongest. Sometimes it takes a lot of effort to go through the dial past a lot of louder, flashier stations to tune into what I'm looking for, but part of what helps is knowing the voices of the regulars on NPR. That way I don't have to wait for an announcement of what station it is if I hear Carl Kassell or Linda Wertheimer or Tom and Ray Magliozzi. I'm afraid that the people taken in by this scam in Brooklyn didn't tune their radios carefully enough, sometimes out of desperation. It's not easy to turn past a station promising 11 grand a month!

What Jesus said about shepherding can be summed up: "Hear, know, and follow." "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Near the beginning of the service we prayed asking God to "Grant that when we hear [Jesus'] voice, we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads."³ But we have our own challenges in hearing, knowing, and following Christ. Hearing is difficult, because more and more things compete for our attention. They're presented in attractive, sophisticated, flashy ways--ways that can all but drown out God's steady calm voice. Living a life where we truly hear--truly listen for what has meaning in the world around us--has never been easy, and it demands that we tune out most of what blares in our ears day by day in order to fine-tune our radios to God's message. How do we fine-tune? By getting to know God's voice through scripture and prayer, worship and study, fellowship and service, and by being patient enough to search until we find it.

And once we've heard, we are to know. Now we can't know without hearing, but knowing is a lot more than just hearing. Knowing is more than just recognizing someone by sight or voice, like I could say I know Barack Obama. Knowing in the fullest sense is intimate, deep, respectful. Truly to know someone is to let them know you honestly, and to let them have an effect on you. Following is where it gets put into practice; following is the behavior, what we do about what we hear and who we know. What Jesus said over and over was not, "Love me," or, "Worship me," but, "Follow me!" Following Jesus is something we do in our life as a church, but it is also something we do when we leave, when we stream out of the church in our different directions like those sheep out of the fold, hearing the voice of our shepherd and following on a journey of service to God. And the eternal life Jesus promises is where this journey is already leading.

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² Suzanne G. Farnham, et al., *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberation* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 27-30.

³ *The Book of Common Prayer* 1979, 225.