

Say Anything (5/3/20)

John 10:1-18

Welcome: Talk about Ed's video.

Announcements: We're still looking for pictures and videos. No communion.

Hymn # 701 Lord, Prepare Me (Sanctuary)

Prayer of Invocation

Holy God, creator of all,
the risen Christ taught from Scripture
of his death, resurrection,
and ascension into your glorious presence.
May the living Lord
breathe on us his peace,
that our eyes may be opened to recognize him in breaking bread
and to follow wherever he leads,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God, you have raised Jesus from the grave
and crowned him Lord of all.

We confess that we have not bowed before him
or acknowledged his rule in our lives.

We have gone along with the way of the world
and failed to give him glory.

Forgive us and raise us from sin,
that we may be your faithful people,
obeying the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who rules the world and is head of the church, his body. **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

God, who is rich in mercy,
out of the great love with which he loved us
even when we were dead through our trespasses,
made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—
and raised us up with him and seated us with him
in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
so that in the ages to come he might show
the immeasurable riches of his grace
in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Prayer for Illumination

God of life, your Spirit raised Jesus from dead.

Your Spirit inspired the prophets and writers of Scripture.

Your Spirit draws us to Christ and helps us to acknowledge him as Lord.

We ask that you will send your Spirit now to give us deeper insight,
encouragement, faith, and hope through the proclamation of the Easter gospel.
Amen.

John 10:1-18

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes ^[a] it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Sermon: *Say Anything*

Good morning. Many thanks to Larry Moran for lending some of his many talents to worship this morning. If you would like to read scripture or any of the other parts of the liturgy, please let me know and we'll work you in.

Last week, a radio host named Richard Hake died. He was the morning host for WNYC in New York, and often, his was the first voice I heard on any given day. He had a wonderful speaking voice, he sounded like he was a kind person. Of course, anyone can present their best self in public, but the station has aired lots of tributes to Hake. Everything that his colleagues have said about him lead me to believe that he was even kinder off the air.

As I listened to all those tributes, I got really sad. The guy was only 51. I don't think he died from COVID-19, but the radio station didn't offer any details, other than to say that Hake died of natural causes. Though I didn't break out in tears, I was surprised that I had such a strong emotional response to his death. I never met the man. I've been listening to his voice for a little less than two years. Why am I having a grief experience? I shouldn't be grieving over this, right?

I think there are two reasons why I felt that way, and both relate to our story from the Gospel of John. First and foremost, there's an intimacy to the sound of the human voice—especially when we're talking to someone face-to-face. Radio captures much of that intimacy in ways that television does not. It's easy to feel like there's a relationship with the person who's speaking over the radio waves. There's something soothing about a familiar voice.

In our reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus declares that he is the Good Shepherd, and the members of his flock know him by the sound of his voice.

There's that intimacy! They know the truth of their relationship with him by the sound of his voice. That's a powerful connection!

This story is really a continuation of a story that was told in the previous chapter, the healing of the man who was blind from birth. We heard that story seven weeks ago, during Lent. This is part of the explanation of that miracle, or sign, as it's called in John's Gospel.

All of the signs, or miracles, in the Gospel of John point to the abundant life that all of us may have when we are in a right relationship with God. Jesus' first public act of ministry in the Gospel of John occurs during a wedding celebration in the village of Cana.

You remember the story: Jesus is at a wedding and the host has just run out of wine. Then Jesus asks the steward to draw some water, and all of a sudden, that water becomes wine. And not just any wine, but the best wine. The bride and groom would have suffered unbelievable shame if they had run out of wine at the wedding celebration—they would have been cut off from their community by that shame. Not only do they remain connected, they provide something better than they or their guests could have imagined: the best wine! That's what God's grace tastes like.

Now consider the man who was born blind. He was a beggar; he was utterly cut off from his community. More than that, everyone assumed that his blindness was some sort of punishment from God. The story begins:

As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me.... (John 9:1-4)

Those works included the healing of the blind man, his restoration to the larger community, and his participation in the fullness of life.

The disciples, of course, have trouble fully understanding this. It probably doesn’t help that the disciples are a bunch of fishermen, and there goes Jesus, giving them a metaphor about sheep and shepherds. But it’s a metaphor about relationship and discipleship, a metaphor they ought to understand, but don’t.

The disciples will, eventually, have to take up that work themselves. Of course, they don’t understand that yet, because they can’t imagine a world without Jesus; they can’t imagine a Messiah who will die; who must die. So, maybe we need to cut them a little slack. We have trouble understanding this stuff, too. We don’t get it the first time we hear it.

As I said earlier, over the last week or so, I've been trying to figure out why I had such a strong emotional response when a radio host—who I didn't know—died suddenly. It's not just the intimacy of the human voice, though. I think we're living in very strange emotional landscape, too.

The coronavirus has disrupted all of our lives. We are trapped in our sheepfolds. Yes, we're safe at home, but our lives are interrupted. This is especially true if you have a loved one in a hospital or a nursing home. And even worse, some of you have been prevented from visiting loved ones as they have died from COVID-19.

We are all experiencing a prolonged grief event. Yet we can't gather and grieve in the ways that are familiar. We can't gather in church or in a funeral home. We can't see one another struggling with this. Sure, we can post pictures on social media, but there's a code of positivity online. There are funny memes and pictures about how difficult homeschooling actually is, but everyone is trying to put on a brave face. Sometimes that's exhausting—even for those who haven't lost a friend of a loved one; even for those who still have their jobs.

The other thing that weighs on all of us so heavily is uncertainty. We don't know when the stay-at-home order will be lifted. We don't know if it's going to be safe to gather in large numbers, or if there will be new outbreaks. We don't know when our lives can return to normal, or if “normal” even applies.

In this emotional environment, everything feels like a trauma. Every little thing becomes a grief event. Every hurt is magnified. Our nerves are fried, our fears and anxieties are amplified, and we feel the pressure to put on a brave face for the rest of the world. Of course, we're exhausted!

But we have to keep moving.

Beloved, I know that seems difficult at this time.

The way forward, as always, is to listen for the call of Jesus' voice.

We were talking about this in Koinonia on Wednesday night. Someone in the group asked, "How do I know when I'm following Jesus' voice? How do I know I'm not just doing what I want to do or what someone else wants me to do?" Those are tough questions. This is why Jesus calls us to be the Church, the body of Christ in the world. This is why faith isn't just an individual pursuit.

Yes, the Church—with a capital C—is our sheepfold. It's the place where the flock of the faithful gather for protection, nurturing, and relationship. It's also a place where disciples are made, a place where sheep become shepherds.

This part of the story is about discipleship and relationship, about entering into an intimate and mutual relationship with Christ. This is a two-way relationship. The blind man needed the healing that came through an intimate relationship with Christ. And Jesus needs disciples—Jesus knows that his time on Earth is limited; his saving and re-creating work must be carried on by his

disciples. That work requires relationship, and that's why this story concludes with a discussion of sheep.

The man who was blind from birth comes to understand his relationship with Jesus through the act of conversation. He truly heard what Jesus said to him, and then he responded in faith. And for the blind man, that response was to enter into an intimate relationship with Jesus.

So, how do we know if we're hearing Jesus' voice? First, Jesus calls us to love and serve others. Jesus calls us to share God's love for the whole world, as good shepherds of a larger flock. So, God's love has to be at the center of anything we're called to do.

Second, we have to enter into close relationships with the other members of the flock who are gathered in our sheepfold. We have to share our stories with one another. We have to build and strengthen relationships with one another. We have to listen and build trust. We have to create the space where we can share our fears, our pain, and our anxiety. In conversation, honest and deep conversation, we can discern whether or not we're hearing Jesus' voice.

We have to follow Jesus' call to be disciples. And eventually, to follow Jesus call to come out of the sheepfold. Yes, we feel safe and protected right now. At the same time, we're chafing in confinement. Being a disciple is extra challenging in this time of quarantine.

But we have to keep moving.

I know you're doing this. I know that our Deacons and Elders are leading the way and checking in with everyone. They're doing a great job. And every one of us can carry on with the wonderful work that the Deacons and Elders are doing. Every one of us can pick up a phone, send an email, or write a note! Let everyone in our sheepfold know they are loved.

It doesn't matter what you say! Say *anything*!

Be creative!

I borrowed the title of my sermon from the movie *Say Anything*. There's an iconic scene in the movie, where John Cusack stands outside of his girlfriend's house and plays his boom box under her bedroom window. If you're between the ages of 35 and 60, I'm sure you know what I'm talking about.

So, here's a creative idea. Instead of a boom box, get some poster board and make a big sign for someone in the congregation. Tell that person that you love them and you miss them. Then go to their house and show them the sign—just do it from a safe distance. You might even talk to someone through an open window or door. It doesn't matter what you say. Say anything.

We don't know how long this period of social distancing will last, but we can fortify one another through our voices. During this season, we can strengthen our bonds with one another. We can make this time bearable for one another. And

we can equip ourselves for the time when we leave the sheepfold. Remember, there are other sheep in other folds, and it's our job to reach them, too.

That's a big challenge. We're not going to meet that challenge fully, so long as we're in quarantine. But the more reach out to one another, the more we listen to one another, the more share our fears and anxieties, and the more we love and support one another—the more we do all those things during this season, the better we shall all be at living into Christ's call to be disciples. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn # 803 My Shepherd Will Supply My Need

Offering WE HAVE TO SPEAK HONESTLY ABOUT OUR FINANCES.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We give our thanks through our talents, our time, and our treasure.

Thanks be to God; whose love creates us!

Thanks be to God; whose mercy redeems us!

Thanks be to God; whose grace leads us into the future! Amen.

Prayers of the People

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn # 298 Lord, You Give the Great Commission

Benediction