



4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER — Sunday, April 17th, 2016

ACTS 9:36-43; PSALM 23;

REVELATION 7:9-17; JOHN 10:22-30

A READING FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with

the request, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

ACTS 9:36-43

PSALM 23

THE LORD is my shepherd; / therefore can I lack nothing.

2 He shall feed me in a green pasture, / and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

3 He shall restore my soul, / and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; / for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.

5 THOU shalt prepare a table before me in the presence of them that trouble me; / thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.

6 Surely thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; / and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

A READING ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION TO JOHN

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

REVELATION 7:9-17

THE HOLY GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO JOHN

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

JOHN 10:22-30

*My sheep hear my voice.
I know them, and they follow me.*

If Jesus spoke near you, would you know it? Would you recognize his voice? Did you ever wonder what Jesus' voice was like? Was he a tenor, a bass, a baritone? Did his voice sound raspy, or like an FM radio commentator, or like Charlton Heston? Was he authoritarian or inclusive when he spoke? I've always thought of him as being confidently soft-spoken?

We wonder also — was everything he said sounding like serious talk? Or did also have an element of uplifting tenor in his speech? Did he ever acknowledge the humour in situations around him that, indeed were kind of funny? When we read aloud what he said in the Gospels, are we coming anywhere close to the way he spoke? What was it in his speech that was able to help hold everyone's attention? And again, would we know Jesus voice, if we actually heard it firsthand?

It is my guess that most of us are quite unsure about knowing the voice of Jesus from that of any other human voice. What is it that makes for a voice? The dictionary on my computer says a voice is: *the sound produced in a person's larynx and uttered through the mouth, as speech or song*. I think that may help a bit. But there is more to a voice than we heard in that 16 word definition.

Consider the following for a moment. On election day, we hear of the voice of the electorate having spoken. In making important decisions that affect other people, we often hear of demands to hear the voice of those impacted. Close to home, it is not unusual to receive a notice of a proposed zoning change. Why are area residents and property holders notified? So the City can hear their voice! So a voice can be the nature of the sound coming out of one's mouth — or it can be the expression of the message we have to offer to others.

Do you think that people hear the voice of God, or of Jesus or of the Holy Spirit today? Some theologians think that God stopped talking to us centuries ago. Others think that people who say they hear the voice of God are delusional. And indeed, we have seen tragic events occur at the hands of some folk who are sure that God told them to go kill someone.

In spite of these awful occurrences, I still believe that God indeed does talk to us. In fact, God in whatever person is constantly talking to us. As his sheep, do we notice? do we pay any attention? And if we do, how often? And if we do notice, how often do we act on what God is saying to us and to our society as a whole?

First of all, I think God rarely becomes conversational. That doesn't mean that some folk haven't actually heard God directly speaking at times. But it would appear that the great majority of folk haven't heard God in the same way that they hear each other most of the time.

So where are we to look now for the voice of our Shepherd? I think there are a few places that will bear fruit. The first is in how God speaks to us through scripture. The wisdom of God is revealed for us all to hear through the Good Shepherd Jesus. But to heed that wisdom, we have to know about it. And to know about it, we have to take the time to read it and ingest it.

Secondly, God speaks to us in the unfolding of history. How does that work? One of many examples is in how over and over again, we see great earthly powers emerge in their quests to be all powerful, only to buckle under their own structures as they eventually fall into ruin.

Thirdly, if we think about it, and look back on our lives, we can see the movement of God in so many of our own experiences. How often have we come close to a personal disaster of one kind or another, only to see things work out well anyway? It may not be every time. But more often than we may generally suspect, you and I have been looked after.

Fourthly, how often have we been led to places we have not wanted to go, only find that we have grown in the experience or even come to embrace these episodes in our lives?

Fifthly, how often have we been wonderfully confronted by the power of love and been slow to take much notice? How often have we been confronted by the power of love and allowed ourselves to actually learn by the experience?

So just for openers, we have God speaking to us:

- through scripture
- through the unfolding of history
- through our own life experiences with God
- by enduring situations we would rather have avoided
- through our being witnesses to the power of love

There are countless other ways.

But the question may still seem to remain: *How am I to recognize or be sure that I am hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd?* A strong clue is found in scripture: *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'* This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Regardless of where one suspects they are hearing the voice of Christ, a major consideration that is always helpful is: *Am I hearing the voice of love or not?* Remember Jesus' words when he says in the Gospel according to John (13:34-35): *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* Notice how we notice in these words, the unmistakable voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd speaking to us. Keep listening and truly be alive. Christ's word is life-giving!