

2020 05 03 – The Good Shepherd

Luke 24:13-35

Have any of you noticed that the number of scam phone calls, emails and texts have increased in the last few weeks? It's as if the thieves and robbers can smell fear and uncertainty in the air and are hyping up their activity to take advantage! Those thieving messages use several tactics, don't they? There are the ones that are fear (like the fake CRA phone calls or the "I've got a video of you" email messages). Then there's the ones that use deception, they try their best to look or sound like the real thing (like the Apple purchases we didn't make, or the Sasktel billing issue we don't have). And then there's the ones that use other forms of persuasion, the ones with a sad story to tell, the ones that just need you to send them a little cash, a money transfer or a gift card. These thieves and robbers are using fear, deception and persuasion to steal our money. They are the marauders or bandits of the 21st century.

But I don't think that these are the type of thieves that Jesus is talking about in today's scripture reading when he says, "whoever doesn't enter the sheepfold through the gate, but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber." Jesus isn't talking about thieves who steal money or valuables. Jesus is talking about robbers who steal sheep, his sheep. Jesus is talking about thieves who are attempting to lead his followers, his flock, spiritually astray, who are trying to convince them that peace and fulfillment can come from false idols. No doubt they are using very similar tactics to today's thieves, tactics of fear, deception and persuasion.

These are the same tactics that are used on us every day of our lives. In today's world we are surrounded by advertising, by messages from companies that are trying to convince us to buy their products. Advertising. It's on our smartphones, our ipads, our computers, our televisions and our radios. It's in our magazines and newspapers, it's even on our buildings. We are soaked in it. There's so much of it that advertisers have realized they have to do something different. So now, rather than selling product, most of them are selling lifestyle, or a way of being. Many are even trying to tell us that their products will give our lives meaning or purpose. I watched part of a documentary about advertising this week. One brand manager said that he was studying and using the methods of persuasion perfected by the leaders of cults.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/>

Think of all the messages we hear every day. They may be messages that increase our level of fear, they may be messages designed to deceive us, or they may be messages created for persuasion. They may be messages that we hear on social medial, from the news, from our friends, from strangers, or they may be messages that come from within ourselves. How do we know which messages to listen to? How do we know which voice to follow? How do we know which path will be life-giving?

Jesus said, "The sheep know the shepherd's voice; the shepherd calls them by name and leads them out. Having led them all out of the fold, the shepherd walks in front of them and they follow." I have to admit, I went on a trip down memory lane this week. You see I grew up on a family farm and we all learned

how to call the sheep and the cows back from the pasture. We didn't call them by name, but the cows always came to, "co-boss, co-boss" and the sheep recognized their call, "ca-nan, ca-nan, ca-nan." We didn't have a sheep dog so our voices had to be enough. I know from experience that sheep do recognize their shepherd's voice. They will come when the shepherd calls.

Jesus is assuring us that we will be able to recognize the voice of our shepherd, the voice of the sacred. He is assuring us that we will know our own truth when we hear it. Jesus is assuring us that even amidst all the other voices in our lives, that still small voice of the divine within each one of us can and will be heard. We just need to make space in our lives to listen. We just need to let go of all the other distractions and recognize what is important, what is real, what is true.

What Jesus is not telling us is that his voice, the voice of Christianity is the only truth, the only path to the sacred. Today's passage uses the metaphor of a gate and many would suggest that this means you have to go through Jesus to find your true path and to connect with God. I believe that Christianity is one way. It happens be my way, but I don't believe that Christianity is the only way to find true meaning and purpose in our lives. I deeply respect and honour those who find their truth, their path in other ways.

But I'm really grateful for the gift of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. I am really grateful for the gospels and all they have to tell us about the promise of new life. I'm really grateful for this particular scripture passage, even with its mixed metaphors and sometimes confusing message. I'm grateful because in

this particular passage, Jesus is telling us, that when we follow our shepherd's voice, when we find our own truth, then we will have full, abundant lives.

Abundant life is the chance to not simply persist, but to thrive, to not simply exist, but to flourish. to have a sense of meaning, purpose and fulfillment, to know and be known, to accept and be accepted. It's the kind of life that is possible when we listen for the voice of the shepherd and follow wherever it may lead us.

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1550>

I'm not saying it's an easy path. There will be many thieves and robbers along the way. There will be many times when it will seem easier to take what looks like a shortcut. But there are no shortcuts in life. This week I watched a video of a shepherd calling her sheep and, at one point, they came to edge of a puddle of water and the flock stopped. The shepherd kept calling them, urging them forward and, after a minute or so, that first sheep jumped. Despite its fear, it jumped and then the others followed. They took the risk because they knew from experience that this path would lead to food and shelter, to what their shepherd had prepared for them..

When you hear the call, I invite you to take the risk and follow wherever the shepherd leads you.