

John 10:1-10
The Good Shepherd

The Voice of God

Jesus said “I am the Good Shepherd”.
He said that the sheep that live in his sheepfold
and belong to him will follow him
because they know the voice of their Shepherd.

I remember one of the first times I heard the voice of God.
Whether it was a messenger of God, like an angel speaking,
or the voice of God himself, I don't know.
But I know the message was from God.

Like the boy Samuel who heard the voice of God for the first time
and got up from his bed and asked Eli the priest,
“Why did you call me?” I didn't recognize the voice at first.

I was sitting in an easy chair in the family room of our home
in Jacksonville, FL sometime around 1990.
There was no one else in the house at the time.

It was a Saturday, summertime, and it was the middle of the afternoon.
I know it was summertime because it was too hot to do anything outside
and I know it was the middle of a summer afternoon
because I was watching a Cubs baseball game on cable TV.

As usual, the Cubs were about 25 games out of first place by then.
Why was I watching a meaningless, boring baseball game
that I didn't really care anything about on a Saturday afternoon?
I was bored and couldn't think of anything else to do.

It was a time in my life when I should have been happy.
I had a beautiful wife, three beautiful children, a nice house, a good job.
I had achieved everything in life I had set out to achieve
but now that I had it, I still felt empty inside
and had no idea what to do about it.

As I sat in the chair staring at the TV, God spoke to me and said:
“I have something better for you than this.”

I sat there and thought to myself:

“OK. I just heard words that came from somewhere
that was different from the thoughts I’m having right now.
I didn’t just think those words in my brain.”

I didn’t hear the words the way you normally process the sound of a voice
from outside through your ears.

I heard a voice that wasn’t my own and I had no idea
where the voice came from.

If anyone in heaven was watching, I’m sure they had a good laugh
at what I did next. I knew the house was empty.

I knew the voice didn’t sound like anyone from my family.

But, I turned around and looked behind me to see if someone was playing
a trick on me even though I knew no one was there.

I knew deep down the message was coming from God
which was both a wonderful and terrible thing .

‘Wonderful’ because in that moment my insides were enlivened
or in the great language of the Rite I Eucharist in the BCP,
my insides were ‘quickenened’.

The voice of God had broken through the fog and dullness of my existence
with the free offer of hope of the ‘abundant life’
Jesus said he came to give.

At the same time ‘terrible’ because in that instant
I felt like I was being intruded upon.

My existence may have settled into a dullness
but it was a dullness regulated by my choices.

Did I really want to hand over the TV remote control to someone else
from beyond who I could not fully comprehend?

Did I want to allow God to enter Myspace.

My life may have been unfulfilled but it was unfulfilled on my terms.

“I have something better for you than this” was inviting
but I realized in that instant if I accepted the invitation,
someone other than myself would be in charge.
I would have to take a risk.

Abraham was a better man than me.
God told him to pick up and go to a land he would show him.
And he picked up and went.

Mary was more faithful than I was.
God asked her to bear His child and she said,
“Here am I, the servant of the Lord;
let it be with me according to your word.”

James and John were better men than me.
Jesus told them to put down their nets and follow him.
They put down their nets and followed.

My reaction was typically modern and skeptical.
“What do you have that’s better than this? I asked.
My interest was piqued but also annoyed and frustrated.
Why are you speaking in riddles?
What do you have that is better than this?”
A consumer mentality and reaction.
I heard the voice one more time: “I have something better for you than this.”

Why did God speak these words to me?
Because God is true to his word.
Jesus said he came for the lost sheep of Israel and
I was a lost sheep of Israel.

He came to seek out the lost because he is the Good Shepherd.
Always has been and always will be.

God alone has the power to come from beyond us and
then change us from the inside out.
The sheep will know and follow one voice and one voice alone.

We are more broken and sinful than we can imagine.
We are more loved and cherished than we can ever dare to hope.

So we need Jesus as our Good Shepherd to bring us back from
from our wanderings and dullness
to the place of green pastures and abundant life.
To know Christ and to serve Him and Him alone is enough to
bring purpose and meaning and joy to any life.

Looking back, his message “I have something better for you than this”
was all I could handle at the time.
If he told me everything that was going to happen and everything
that I would have to do to follow his voice,
I would have quit before I started.
The journey would have seemed too long and too hard.

So God only reveals to us what we need to know
when in his wisdom he decides we need to know.
And he reveals what we need to know and
sends everything we will need along the way.

God doesn't bargain or explain.
He makes known to us and provides for us what we need in His time

Jesus said he came so that we might have life and have it abundantly.
I have experienced peaks and valleys,
moments of heavenly bliss and times of desert wandering.

Times of clarity and certainty about God, God's ways and directions in life
and times of doubt and uncertainty.
But, I am no longer bored.

And God is true to his word. He always has something better for us
than when we live life on our own terms and
settle for less than he has to offer.

God's visitation to me almost twenty years ago is a well of living water
I return to often.
The encounter helped shape my understanding of God.
I know without a doubt that God is real,
that God comes to us from beyond us and
lowers Himself to communicate and live with us.

I know that God's grace precedes us.
He sought me out before I did anything to earn or deserve his grace.
Therefore, everything we have in life including our life is rightfully his.

The 'abundant life' in Christ is a life lived listening to God
through His Word and Spirit.

The 'abundant life' in Christ is a life lived
accepting his invitation,
obeying his commandments,
believing His promises and blessings,
and then responding to God with all that we have and all that we are
in a relationship that grows in covenant trust and love
each time we hand over the remote control to God.

The more we do these things the more we will come to believe:
"I have something better for you than this."