

Easter 4C

April 25, 2010

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 9:36-43 Peter revives Tabitha.

Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd.

Rev 7:9-17 We are washed in the blood of the Lamb.

John 10:22-30 My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd.

My sheep hear my voice.

The Bible uses the metaphor of shepherd and sheep again and again to describe the relationship between God and faithful followers. The twenty-third Psalm is the favorite psalm for many people. In the *Jubilate Deo* we say: "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture." In all honesty, it is probably not comforting to most people to be compared to sheep. Besides being woolly and cute, you will probably agree that sheep are not very smart, easily led, and influenced by a sort of "herd instinct" where, if one sheep jumps, all the rest panic. People, on the other hand, believe we are intelligent, and capable of individual action—set above the influence of the "herd" instinct. The value of this metaphor of being sheep, then, is not so much in the *character* of the sheep, but in the *relationship* between the shepherd and the sheep.

The essence of the relationship is dependence, love, and trust that the sheep hold for the shepherd. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

Jesus described in today's Gospel lesson that those same three verbs describe the behavior of people who believe; to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, to know him, and to follow where he leads.

**We hear** Jesus and are aware of his presence by deliberately listening and looking for him. It is by keeping aware; being open to the holy mystery of his involvement in our life; and being in conversation with him every day – following Paul's advice to pray without ceasing. **We hear** Jesus through the words and actions of other people (Mother Theresa, famous actors raising money for Sudanese or Haitians).

Two men were walking along a crowded city sidewalk. Suddenly, one of the men remarked, "Listen to the lovely sound of that cricket," But the other man could not hear the sound. He asked his friend how he could hear the sound of a cricket amidst the roar of the traffic and the sound of the people. The first man, who was a zoologist, had trained himself to hear the sounds of nature. He didn't explain to his friend in words how he could hear the sound of the cricket, but instead, he reached into his pocket, pulled out a 50 cent piece, dropped it onto the sidewalk, and watched as a dozen people began to look for the coin as they heard it clanking around amid the sounds of the traffic and the the crowded city. He turned to his friend and said, "We hear what we listen for."

You and I need to be deliberate about listening for God by recognizing holy mystery when it happens, and not giving it up to luck or chance. We need to be in conversation with him every day, sharing our life with him. We need to pay attention to God trying to get our attention through other people.

**We know** Jesus by being in fellowship with other believers. When we meet to study, we can ask questions, share experiences, and grow together. **We know** Jesus by studying in private, whether we are using a formal bible study, or a quick reflection in Forward Day by Day, or praying. **We know** Jesus by talking with Christian friends about our experience of living with Christ as our model.

Through our knowing Jesus, we know God.

Through us and our actions, people know Jesus. (Others will know you are my disciples by the way you love one other.)

It has been said that by knowing God, you become a place where God happens.

The works Jesus did testify that he is the Messiah.

The works we do in Jesus' name testify that we know him; others can know him through us.

**We follow** by choosing to believe. It is a choice to be freely made about who God is.

Jesus said that those who do not follow him are not among the "sheep." Some people want a plain, black-and-white answer to life, not the invitation Jesus gives to live in holy mystery.

The religious leaders in Jerusalem wanted a black and white answer: "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." They just couldn't settle for Jesus' invitation to live in Holy Mystery. Jesus offered his words, his deeds, his compassion, his love, and his sacramental presence, but that wasn't enough. Why wouldn't Jesus just give them some kind of proof that he is the Messiah?

The Messiah **they expected** was a deliverer from Israel's oppressors. But Jesus brought a very different kind of deliverance, from a more universal kind of oppression. Jesus told the Jewish religious leaders that he was one with God, sharing a common work with God the Father, but not claiming to be the Father. Through the Holy Mystery that we call the Paschal Mystery, more than political freedom was at stake; even death would be transformational. Jesus offers this holy mystery to humanity.

Quietly consider: My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

There comes a time when evaluating the evidence has to come to an end. The gap between the known and the possible is only bridged with faith.

The gifts of Easter season; Christ's resurrection, his appearances, his promises of eternal life, are not ours because of evidence alone; not by experimentally proven theories; but by a choice

of faith. That choice of faith is one we are asked to make; a choice we may freely reject or receive.

Let us pray. Lord God, help us in our daily choice to believe without reservation in the Holy Mystery of your Son. Help us to see him as our shepherd; to hear his voice, to know his presence with us and in us, and to follow him through our decisions and words and actions. We pray in the Name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.