

The Call to Welcome All

**Psalm 23 and John 10:22-30 | Fourth Sunday of Easter | May 11, 2025 |
Pastor John Klawiter, preaching**

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

I had a young adult talk to me recently about her struggles. She admitted, “when I pray, I’m not hearing anything back from God.”

Now, this isn’t someone who is a skeptic—like, why doesn’t God have a voice. It’s someone who’s felt God’s presence and guidance before, but she admitted that since suffering a moral injury, she struggles to hear God.

Have you ever felt that way?

What do we do when the voice of the shepherd is faint? What if we don’t hear it all? Does that mean God isn’t present?

Is it a “me” problem... or a God problem?

It’s tempting to get drawn into those types of conclusions. Especially when Jesus says in today’s reading, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”

What do we do when we don’t hear the voice? Are we not part of Jesus’s flock?

I don’t know what Jesus’ voice sounds like. Not the human voice that was present with the disciples that winter day on Solomon’s porch.

But I do know what the voice of God sounds like from a Holy Spirit perspective.

And I can understand the struggle when I sit with people who are frustrated at God, or don’t feel like God is speaking to them. It’s not always clear what the Spirit is saying to me. I’m not always ready to receive the message.

To me, following the shepherd comes in different means. When I see God’s hand at work or when I can trust that what I’m doing is the right thing to do.

There’s something sacred about that. It might be discerning right and wrong—and that doesn’t always mean that the right thing to do is the easy thing to do.

Sermon Transcript

The shepherd is also present in the struggle. In the suffering. Not to tell me what to do or that the suffering is for a reason, but to be present in that pain.

God feels like the trusting and caring people in my life. Co-workers, church members, friends, family. It's people that I know have my back and in turn, know that I have theirs.

The shepherd doesn't say whatever the flock wants to hear. The shepherd, like we heard with Peter last week, is tasked with tending the sheep, through all the dangers that come.

A shepherd doesn't always say the popular thing. Jesus sure doesn't.

In fact, his boldness threatens those in positions of leadership within his religious and cultural community.

An interesting detail to keep in mind about who his audience is. While the beginning of the 10th chapter of John also talks about Jesus as the gatekeeper and the good shepherd, there's a distinct change in setting for today.

It's now winter. Hanukkah. That season around Christmas time for us.

What does Christmas mean for us? We celebrate incarnation—Christ birth. God coming into the world.

Hanukkah is a celebration too.

In 2nd century BC, a small group of Jewish fighters liberated the temple from an occupying army. With the dwindling supply of pure oil found in the temple, they lit the menorah, and it stayed lit for 8 days.

The event that Jesus attends is a reminder of the light in the darkness and even the smallest, least likely resistance to an oppressing force can transform—it can bring light to the world.

That's actually why Jesus frustrates his audience. They are oppressed again. Peace doesn't last long. They're looking for signs of hope. Signs of a Messiah.

This guy, Jesus, acts like a Messiah, but he won't come right out and say it.

So they ask him directly, "Are you the Messiah, tell us plainly?"

Sermon Transcript

²⁵ Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep.

It’s tempting to draw the conclusion that Jesus is drawing lines in the sand—you’re out because you’re not my sheep.

But it’s actually more of an observation. Jesus continues to act on behalf of the mission, done in the name of our Father in heaven, yet the resistance continues.

I see this statement as more matter of fact. They choose to ignore his voice. To be on the outside.

Jesus goes all on in. On this Hanukkah, he’s thinking about how the small forces defended the temple and succeeded. Lives were protected. People were saved. The flock remained.

So he concludes that

²⁹ My Father, in regard to what he has given me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one.”

Yet, after saying this, the response isn’t acceptance. It’s resistance. Jesus isn’t seen as the Messiah. He’s seen as the opposing Army.

³¹ The Jews took up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?”

Jesus is the force that needs to be destroyed. He’s threatening their power and who could ruin Hanukkah.

He’s like Cousin Eddie in Christmas Vacation, showing up in his bathrobe and RV in time for Christmas. Uninvited and everyone wishing he’d just go away.

Is it a surprise that they’ll finally succeed when Passover, an even bigger holiday, rolls around?

Why are they so mad?

They argue that he’s making himself God.

Sermon Transcript

Ironically, they're right. He is God. But even though the proof is right in front of them, they refuse to see it. They refuse to believe.

Jesus, somehow, slips away. He survives and heads back to the countryside by the Jordan.

This shepherd returns to his flock.

A shepherd says what needs to be said and encourages the flock to build trust. Trust is so important. It can be life or death, especially in the case of some of those sheep.

Over time, I've seen how different churches embrace this model of the shepherd. Some churches have a tightly controlled gate. Once you're in, you get the protection of the shepherd and the congregation.

It's about making sure that you are on the inside.

This model also is willing to kick out sheep that don't fit. They have strict rules about which sheep could even be loved by God in the first place. It's tempting to keep the flock in line through fear.

At Faith, we resist this opposing enemy force. It's not easy. We want to say that All are Welcome in this pasture, but living into that puts us to the test. Fortunately, we're reminded that the welcome doesn't come from us. It's a direct call from the Holy Spirit.

Our welcome statement, created in 2016, boldly invites sheep into the fold:

“Come and listen for the Holy Spirit that calls us to love our neighbor wholeheartedly, seek justice, create peace and practice compassion.

We celebrate your identity and welcome you to a diverse community of believers united in Christ.

You are welcome here.

There's nothing we do that could ever take away the love and grace of God. When we feel lost, Christ will search the ends of the earth if that's what it takes.

In the first address by the new pope, he immediately pointed to THEE shepherd. Christ.

Sermon Transcript

Peace be with you all. Dearest brothers and sisters, this is the first greeting of the Risen Christ, the good shepherd who gave his life for the flock.

I too would like this greeting of peace to enter your hearts, to reach your families, and all people, wherever they are, all of the people, all over the earth.

Peace be with you.

Beloved sheep of God, the presence of God is all around us. The Holy Spirit calls us, each in different ways. You are part of the flock. Peace be with you. Amen.