

“The Voice of the Shepherd: Now and Forever”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

It was the winter season. The Feast of Dedication—Hanukkah—was underway in Jerusalem. The temple courts were filled with those bustling about in religious fervor, holding tight to traditions, but deaf to the One standing in their midst. Jesus walked in Solomon’s Colonnade. And the people came to Him—not to listen, but to interrogate: “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

He had told them plainly. He had shown them with works of mercy, with power over demons, with words of life. But they did not believe—because, He said, “you are not among My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

The Good Shepherd speaks. And His sheep listen.

The Shepherd’s Voice in a World of Wolves

We are not in Solomon’s Colonnade today. We’re in a world every bit as chaotic and hostile, where Christ’s voice is muffled by a thousand competing noises: the shrill cry of culture, the cynicism of unbelief, the whisper of the wolf who prowls and waits. This world has no shortage of shepherds—false ones—who promise freedom, but lead flocks off cliffs.

And that’s exactly what Paul warned the Ephesian elders about in our first reading today. Picture this moment: Paul, on the beach at Miletus, surrounded by the pastors he had trained and loved, men who had suffered alongside him. His voice was filled with urgency. “I know,” he said, “that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock... from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

Fierce wolves, from without and within.

Paul knew the sheep are always under threat. He had lived it. He had seen the danger. He had spent years not just preaching but weeping, warning, teaching day and night. Why? Because the Shepherd’s voice was his voice, and he had been sent to guard the flock with that voice. Not his own wisdom. Not opinions. But the voice of Christ, through the Word.

That’s how sheep are guarded: by hearing the Shepherd’s voice.

The Voice That Gives Life

Let's return to Jesus' words: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life."

There's a story of a British soldier in World War I who was gravely wounded in battle. As he lay in a hospital bed, he was restless and agitated. A nurse offered him water, but he turned away. A chaplain visited, but he would not speak. A nurse who had grown up in a Welsh farming village took his hand and began to speak softly: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..." The soldier's eyes opened. She continued: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures..." His lips began to move. By the time she whispered, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," tears were streaming down his face. It wasn't just a comforting psalm. It was the Shepherd's voice. And the sheep recognized it. The same Shepherd who gave His life on the cross now speaks through His Word. His voice rings out in the waters of Holy Baptism—where He says, "You are Mine." His voice is heard in the Holy Supper—where He says, "This is My body, given for you... My blood, shed for you." His voice forgives, restores, and leads.

This voice gives life. Eternal life. And not just in some distant future—though that too—but even now, in the deepest valleys and fiercest storms.

The Voice That Guards Forever

This leads us to that breathtaking scene in Revelation 7. The Apostle John sees a vision that defies imagination: a multitude so great no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They are clothed in white. They hold palm branches of victory.

And the elder says, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

The Lamb—our Shepherd. Then these words echo, words that we might overlook if not for their sheer tenderness:

**"The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and He will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."**

He will be their Shepherd. Forever. This is not just poetic imagery. This is the eternal safety of the sheep who listened to His voice, followed Him through the wilderness of this life, and now rest in His arms.

Real Faith, Real Lives, Real Shepherd

Once there was a woman named Elsie. She was 96 years old when she died. Frail in body, strong in faith. She had lived through wars, the Great Depression, cancer, the loss of her husband and two children. But every Sunday, she was in church. Her hearing was nearly gone, her sight dim, but when the pastor read the Gospel, her lips would move along, silently, reciting the words she had heard her whole life. When asked why she never missed the Divine Service, she smiled and said, “Because I know whose voice I need to hear. He’s led me this far. I’m not going to stop listening now.” She died with John 10 read at her bedside. Elsie knew what many have forgotten: it is not enough to know *about* Jesus. We must know His voice. Hear it. Follow it. Trust it.

Listening in a World of Noise

Today, we are constantly listening—to podcasts, news, social media, opinions, and gossip. We live with headphones in our ears, but too often, the Shepherd’s voice is drowned out. This isn’t just bad for our spiritual health. It’s dangerous. The devil doesn’t always come with a pitchfork. Sometimes he comes in a suit, in a classroom, or even in a pulpit. He questions, twists, confuses, and deceives. And unless we know the Shepherd’s voice, we won’t even realize we’re being led away. So let me be blunt: If you’re not hearing Christ’s Word regularly—in Divine Service, in your daily life, in your home—you are vulnerable.

Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders are not just for pastors. They are for all of us: “*Be alert.*” But we are not left alone. The Shepherd not only gives His voice, He gives His Spirit. He places us in a flock—not isolated, but together. He gives us under-shepherds—faithful pastors—who preach not themselves but Christ crucified. And He promises that no one—no wolf, no temptation, no suffering, not even death—can snatch us from His hand.

Conclusion: Follow the Voice

So hear Him again:

“My sheep hear My voice.”

“I know them.”

“They follow Me.”

“I give them eternal life.”

“They will never perish.”

“No one will snatch them out of My hand.”

This is not conditional. This is not a maybe. This is promise. This is security. This is the Shepherd’s love. And so, beloved: Listen. Listen to the voice that called you in Baptism. Listen to the voice that speaks forgiveness. Listen to the voice that promises life, that walks with you through the valley, that sets a table before you in the presence of your enemies. Listen to the voice that will one day call you home.

And when you stand with that great multitude—clothed in white, palms in hand, tears gone, fears gone, sin gone—you will not just hear His voice. You will see Him. Face to face. The Lamb. Your Shepherd. Your Savior. And you will say, with joy that words cannot express: “The Lord is my Shepherd... and I shall not want.” Amen.

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