

**“The Abundant Life”**

*“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).*

It’s amazing how you can know a voice before you see a face. You can be standing in a crowded gym or a sanctuary teeming with people, and yet, a familiar voice will cut through the noise and be instantly known. A child hears her mother and turns without thinking. A husband hears his wife in the next room and immediately recognizes her voice. You don’t have to think about or study it. You just know it, because you have lived with, loved, and learned to trust that voice. And that is the image Jesus gives us today.

Today, John writes, “The sheep hear his voice...He calls his own sheep by name and...The sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” And then Jesus says, “A stranger they will not follow.” That’s the heart of this text. There is a voice that gives life, and there are other voices that do not. There is a Shepherd, and there are thieves. There is a gate, and there are those who try to climb in by some other way. There is truth, and there are lies. There is Christ, and there is everything else.

When you boil today’s Gospel reading down to this basic contrast, it suddenly feels very personal, because we live in a world full of voices. Some voices flatter and some voices frighten. Some voices seduce and some voices shame. Some voices promise freedom while quietly leading us into slavery. And some voices tell us that life will finally begin when we have accumulated enough money, enough control, enough pleasure, enough security, enough recognition, enough spiritual insight, enough righteousness of our own.

And beneath all those voices is the lie that you can make your own way without the Shepherd. And about this voice Jesus says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.” This is serious language, and it needs to be, because the wrong voices do real damage. They steal peace. They kill faith. They destroy souls. And what makes those voices so dangerous is that they do not always sound evil at first. Often, they sound wise, they sound practical, and sometimes, they even sound religious. Yet in the end, these voices all tell you that there must be some way to life other than Christ. And our sinful flesh eats this up, because deep down, we all want to be more than sheep. But today, the words Jesus uses will not let us do that. He calls us sheep, because sheep are not strong, sheep are not impressive and sheep are not self-reliant. Instead, Sheep wander. Sheep panic. Sheep are vulnerable. And that is us.

Peter says it plainly in today’s Epistle reading: “For you were straying like sheep.” This is not merely what we once did. It is what we always do. We wander into pride. We wander into fear. We wander into lust. We wander into bitterness. We wander into self-pity. We wander into the illusion that if we just had the right plan or insight, the right discipline or circumstances, then we could secure life for ourselves. But Jesus says life is not found in the sheep. Life is found in Him.

Notice how Jesus describes Himself. First, He is the Shepherd who comes by the door. Then He says, “I am the door,” or, “I am the gate.” And the truth is, He is both. He is the Shepherd who comes for the sheep, and He is the gate through which the sheep are saved. That means Jesus is not merely one spiritual option among many. He is not one voice among many. No. He is *the* gate, and whoever enters through Him will be saved – not improved or inspired or encouraged – but *saved!*

You see, this text is not about learning to be better sheep. It is about Jesus doing for the sheep what the sheep cannot do for themselves. The Shepherd leads the sheep to pasture. He leads them to safety. He leads them to life. And that word “life” is the climax of the text. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

When we hear the phrase, “abundant life,” we usually imagine abundance the way the world defines it. More comfort. More money. More success. More visible blessings. But that is not what Jesus means. The abundant life is not having everything you want. It is having the Shepherd. It is belonging to Christ and being known by Him and called by name. It is being gathered into His forgiven flock and brought through death into life. That is where the voice of the Shepherd leads, and this is where today’s reading from Acts is really helpful because if you want to know where and how the Shepherd speaks, the answer is right here: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” This is where the Shepherd speaks. In the Apostles’ teaching. In the fellowship of His people. In the breaking of bread. In the prayers of His Church.

This is not just a description of something the Church used to do. This is the life of the Church right now. This is how the Shepherd creates and gathers His flock. This is how He calls us by name. This is where He leads us out and brings us in. This is where He gives the life He promises. And the voice of the Shepherd is not vague or mystical. It is not based on your feelings or hidden in some secret, spiritual code. The voice of the Shepherd says, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The voice of the Shepherd says, “I forgive you all your sins.” The voice of the Shepherd says, “This is My body. This is My blood.” And the voice of the Shepherd says, “Fear not, for I am with you, I have called you by name; you are Mine.”

With these words, He creates a people, He gathers us into a flock, and He makes us into a family. And that is what we see in Acts 2. They are gathered around Christ’s gifts, and they share life together. They care for each other and bear one another’s burdens. They give generously to meet needs. They eat together, pray for each other and, in Christ, they become a caring family. And that is what abundant life looks like in real time. Abundant life looks like church family where the lonely are remembered, where the dying are comforted, where meals are delivered in time of crisis, and where children are taught the faith. Abundant life looks like neighbors welcomed, sins forgiven, and burdens shared.

In short, Abundant life looks like the Good Shepherd caring *for* His people, *through* His people. God feeds us, so that we can feed others. God comforts us, so we can comfort others. God forgives us, so that we can forgive others. Don’t miss the order here! First, He speaks. First, He saves. First, He gives life, and then His sheep live and love and serve.

Today, Jesus is not giving you an assignment, He is giving you Himself. And that brings us back to where we began. There is something remarkable about knowing a voice before you see a face, and today, that is the case. We hear His voice before we see His face. We know Him now in His Word. We know Him now in His gifts. We know Him now in His mercy. We know Him now because He keeps speaking to us. And one day, the voice we have heard in a promise, is the voice we will hear in person. Until then, fellow sheep of the Good Shepherd, listen to His voice. Stay where He speaks. Feast where He feeds. Rest where He forgives. Follow the Shepherd who goes ahead of you, even through death itself, and who says to you today: “I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly.” Go with the peace of this promise, God has made to you today, and all God’s people say, “Amen!”

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