

Peter M. Antoci
Easter A4
Good Shepherd Sunday
Acts 2:42-47, John 10:1-10

Listening

As I read over the Gospel today, a few words really struck me: voice, hear, listen, and know. These are all about recognition, and connection; about reaching out, and reaching forward. But really engaging with others, and reaching forward to the future, isn't always easy. It requires some trust in grace.

While we live in a time when our means of communication have never been greater, we also live in a time when our capacity for listening to each other has never been worse. But for the community of faith, one thing remains the same: we still gather to listen, know, and seek the voice of the One who knows us better than we know ourselves. This is the one who knocks on the door of our heart: Jesus, the Good Shepherd. In John's language, He is calling us to go through the gate of our deepest heart. No one, no ministry, no community, can follow Christ without this one word: LISTEN.

LISTEN for the voice of the Good Shepherd, because these questions will bubble up throughout our lives: WHY AM I HERE? Why are WE here? How did it come to this? Our lives and our faith reach forward, seeking to flow forth in trust and faith into the future; but if we lose our grasp of the ground on which we stand, we won't get far. I'm not speaking in generalities. I'm speaking about the ground from which YOUR life, and MY life, springs forth. The ground from which our church communities live. The ground that makes it possible to understand why we are here, in this time and space, in this community of believers. What voice have we followed into THIS day: April 26th, 2026?

I'm sure we could each give different answers to that question. The variety of answers has to do with the variety of life experience we have had. But this variety also has to do with the ways we've HEARD that precious voice of the Good Shepherd, and the ways we REMEMBER hearing it. You see, the story we TELL about our lives shapes us, as much as we shape it. But you will need to take time to listen to your own story. St. Augustine reminded us: "*There is within us a memory of beginnings from which our lives continually flow forth, like the rivers that flowed out of paradise.*" So how did YOU get to this place and day? How did our church community get to where it is? In some fundamental way, listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd is a gateway for us; a gateway back into the ground and source of our very selves, as much as it is a departure point into the future.

As a departure point, that voice, that gateway, is fraught with uncertainty, but it holds a promise. That promise comes from fundamental acts of a Christian living: study, fellowship, communion, generosity, and thanksgiving. We hear all about these today in the second chapter of Acts. The early Christian community was trying to work out the STORY of how THEY got to where they were. It is a story of how they moved out of fear into a shockingly confident vision of life that was changed forever by the resurrection of Jesus. If we made a habit of listening closely to our own stories, we too might see strands of grace and resurrection running through it. Whose teaching – whose companionship – whose generosity – was the voice of the Good Shepherd in YOUR story? If we keep on listening, we may still hear it in the days ahead. Who knows? We might even BE that voice for someone else!

The earliest representation of Jesus in art is *The Good Shepherd*. It is not a cross, and certainly not a king. THAT picture of Jesus, the one who knows us and whom WE know, expressed something profound about the story of those early Christians. In a time and place that cared

little about what they or God had to say, the image of the Good Shepherd expressed their sense of listening for God, and God listening for them. It expressed their sense of being profoundly, physically and spiritually, CONNECTED to Jesus and one another.

The story and imagery of these earliest Christians tell us that the act of LISTENING is part and parcel of the spiritual journey into grace. It is never the END of the story, nor is it ever the whole story. As long as we have breath within us, *there is listening to be done*, for the work of the Good Shepherd to be complete. With each new day, we can return to that gateway within us, that heart of our hearts, where we find the love of God smiling back at us, and gently saying: FOLLOW ME.

Reference:

Bruno Barnhart. *Second Simplicity*, 1999. Pp. 37-38.