

Title: My Sheep know my Voice

Text: John 10

Rev. Sharon Smith

Have you ever had the experience where you have an idea and you can't get it out of your head or heart?

- A person you need to call?
- A letter you need to write? A task you just have to do?
- A spark of a project you just need to start?

Or you are having a conversation with a friend or in a meeting or at a dinner table and a particular idea starts to shine or resonate or deepen in your heart. And its like you are compelled to act on it.

Friends, in Christian theology these **may just be** what we call the voice of God or the promptings of the Spirit.

I am convinced that God still speaks today and that we are led in a very personal and communal way.

But how do we know? How do we know that what we are experiencing is the leading of God?

Today's gospel guides us in this particular direction... through metaphors and images.

- Jesus the Christ is like a Shepherd – a Good Shepherd
- Jesus the Christ is like a Door or Gate
- We have the contrast of thieves or bandits and wolves
- People are described as sheep
- People are described in terms of where they belong

I am not sure about you, but I don't really like to think of myself as a sheep!

But I like to know that I am not alone, that I belong in community.

And I really really like to know that I am being shepherded by someone Good!

We read that **the sheep know the voice of the Shepherd**

We read that **the Shepherd leads the sheep.**

This is something we can count on. That we are not wandering willy-nilly.

That as we attend to our life we can see that there is One who, as theologian Karl Rahner says: speaks as an act of unpredictable personal love.

The process of attending to the Spirit's leading is what we call 'discernment'.
As Anglicans we discern the voice of the living God corporately and individually.

- Yesterday I had the privilege to sit with a person who had felt called to pursue the ministry of a deacon in the church. He had a deep desire to use his gifts in the community to meet the housing needs of people in need in Metro Vancouver.
- I was blessed by our process together.
- He had spent time over the past year reflecting on and writing about his life. What had brought him to this moment, what was on his heart to do. He had articulated this sense to a group of people in his parish.
- And now I got to ask him some questions to deepen that sense and test it.
- We were 5 people surrounding him – attending, straining to hear, leaning in to nurture this deep sense that just maybe the Shepherd was leading, the Spirit was nudging.

Most often discernment has been fleshed out for people who sense a 'call' from God to do something in and for the church.

But friends, this 'call' from God is with us in our everyday lives in all that we do. In all the promptings we sense. Some are straight forward and we just get on with it using our common sense.

But some are more puzzling and we need to discern – what do we do here?

- Is this something I do?
- Or how do I do that?

"Discernment is perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual guidance and understanding"

How do we discern in the everyday?

First - The life of Jesus in our Gospels – provides a pattern for our lives.

Giving us a set of values for action. Wisdom to follow.

So as we read it and study it (not only intellectually but with our actions in mind) we become shaped by these stories and words over time.

Second - Christians for 2 thousands years have also modelled ways of living – many through difficult times. And we get to dig deep into tradition and allow these ancestors, these saints to give us a pattern for living.

And today we honour the many women whose lives offer inspiration to us.

For me today I think of Hildegard of Bingen who like a Shepherd, led many people to green pastures:

- She spoke of *viriditas* – a belief that the Spirit was all around making all things new

- I often meditate on her words:
“The mystery of God hugs you in its all-encompassing arms.”
- She also said:
“Glance at the sun. See the moon and stars. Gaze at the beauty of the green earth.
Now think.”

Thirdly, we discern in our parish community –

The gift of Christian community is precisely that we are different.

As we engage in conversation with each other – we see things more clearly.

At our vestry’s and our synods we get to see this in action:

Where each of us brings a certain perspective or wears a certain hat and together we make a whole. This is how we discern...

- The **white** hat: This is the objective hat, which focuses on facts and logic
This is how much it will cost, this is the state of the building, this is how many people are willing to be part of this initiative
- The **red** hat: This is the intuitive hat, focusing on emotion and instinct
There is something about this that excites me, I feel energized, I sense this is important
- The **black** hat: This is the cautious hat, used to predict negative outcomes
The one who says I don’t think this is going to work and this is why
- The **yellow** hat: This is the optimistic hat, used to look for positive outcomes
I think if we do this then this will happen. I saw a community in Toronto do this and this is what happened – it was amazing.
- The **green** hat: This is the creative hat, where ideas are abundant and criticism spare
Not only can we do this but we can do that and that and that also!
- The **blue** hat: This is the hat of systems and management – how will this fit into what we already do? What are the steps involved in doing that?

All of these perspectives, these voices in community are essential. We need them all.
Spoken with grace and kindness.

The invitation to us today is that in community, we get to also bring our personal dilemmas also to gain the wisdom of the whole. To gain perspective.

As much as I resist it – I am a sheep. I need community. I belong.

**The sheep know the voice of the Shepherd.
The Shepherd leads the sheep.**

May it be so.