

battle raging for the minds and hearts of the world, and we're becoming numb to it. The voices are so hard to filter that we often simply listen to the voice that speaks loudest and is the most persistent.

But what if, amid the dissonance of the world's voices rage, there is One Voice that has been quietly speaking since before all other voices spoke? One Voice that is endlessly calling your name and offering a way through the chaos? One Voice that remains constant amid the ever-changing messages of culture and context? One Voice that does not add worry or stress, but offers a peace that passes all understanding? What if, amid the host of voices reaching out to us, there was One Voice above all others that we really should seek out, listen to, and follow?

There is such a voice: One Voice that promises to equip us to live in this world and teach us how to deal with all the counterfeit and competing claims. It is the voice of Triune God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit who spoke creation into existence and still speaks with the same power and authority today. It is the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. John 10:1-10 tells us that we can know this voice, distinguish it from the false voices of the world, and follow as it leads us to life.

When Jesus spoke to a group of Pharisees, he talked about shepherds, gates, and sheep. Scripture often refers to the leaders of God's people as shepherds; and there are both bad shepherds and good shepherds. To the bad leaders of his day, the prophet Ezekiel warned, "Woe, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?" (Ezekiel 34:2). Ezekiel criticizes them saying, "You have not strengthened the weak; you have not healed the sick; you have not bound up the injured; you have not brought back the strays; you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them" (Ezekiel 34:4).

Strengthening the weak, healing the sick, bringing back the strays, and seeking the lost are the responsibilities of good shepherd leaders. When the rulers of Israel would not do this important work, God declared, "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep...I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strays, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak...I will feed them with justice" (Ezekiel 34:15-16).

The promised Messiah would be a King-Shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23-34), a description that captures the reality of God's reign. Shepherds did not hold positions of power or status or influence; it was through service and self-sacrifice that God expected God's people to lead.

Jesus' rebuke left no doubt how he felt about those who speak and think like the world around them: they are bandits and thieves who intend only evil, and they cannot be trusted. No matter how glossy the words sound, how well they speak, or what they offer, the world's voices seek only what is best for themselves. By contrast, the King-Shepherd speaks grace and forgiveness, justice and mercy.

Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:14). According to Jesus, the people of Israel are a flock of sheep, gathered in God's sheep pen. They are safe in the pen unless a bad shepherd, a thief or a bandit, climbs over the fence to make trouble. By contrast, says Jesus, the "one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers" (John 10:2-5).

Jesus says we can clearly discern his voice and follow where he leads us. His voice is known to us through Scripture and through the witness of faithful disciples around us. We need not follow strange voices because the Good Shepherd knows us by name and we can trust him when he calls. The Good Shepherd is the One Voice worth following because it leads us to new life.

To avoid any confusion, Jesus concludes by saying, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will bind up the injured, strengthen the weak, feed the hungry, and bring justice to the oppressed. Jesus commands us to "love one another" (John 13:34), to feed his lambs and tend his sheep (John 21:15-16). He even goes so far as to lay down his life for us, so that we can enjoy forgiveness and everlasting life. Jesus wants us all to "have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, loves his sheep, and the sheep respond with love for him. He is the Good Shepherd by how he leads his sheep: he is ahead of his flock guiding, not behind his flock driving. He is a kind shepherd who leads from the front, not a critical voice that drives from behind through coercion or fear. Thus, the sheep listen to his voice and follow him because they trust him. The Good Shepherd is the guide to abundant life, pictured in Psalm 23 as "green pastures...still waters...right paths" (vv. 2-3). Abundant life is a gift of the risen Jesus, celebrated with joy during the Easter season. By contrast, Jesus says, the thief "comes only to steal and kill and destroy," which is abundant death, not life (John 10:10).

We live in a world of competing voices, many of which want to steal or kill or destroy. Some voices try to scare us, while other voices want to seduce us. Many voices promise that real happiness will come through bigger televisions, stylish outfits, a newer car, a brighter smile, a slimmer waistline, or a dream vacation. Still others want our votes or a donation to a particular cause.

Yet, out there amid the noise, there is a voice that speaks truth, a voice that speaks directly to your heart. The One Voice says you are worthy as you are. The One Voice says you are good enough, smart enough, and loved enough. The One Voice says you are forgiven and redeemed. The One Voice says you there is peace and eternal life for those who hear and follow. The One Voice calls you by name and reminds us that salvation comes through a personal relationship with the living God. The One Voice offers new life through God's grace and faith in Jesus Christ.

The voice of the Good Shepherd is the source of life. He is the maker of all things. It was by his voice life was spoken into existence and it is by his voice today that he offers us new life. Whereas the thief comes to steal and destroy, the Good Shepherd comes to lay down his life, so that his sheep may live, and have life in abundance. What better voice to listen to than that one that spoke you into existence, who knows the number of hairs on your head, and who has great plans and hopes for your life, who controls and sees all things, and who wants only good for you.

Only the voice of the Good Shepherd matters. Rather than wasting our time with fearful voices, we are called to love our neighbors, pray for those who persecute us, strengthen the weak, feed the hungry, and advocate for justice. As we hear the Good Shepherd's voice and follow his way, we will gain courage and strength. We will find that the Shepherd is leading us to new and abundant life. The Shepherd is always ahead of us, leading us on the right path.

Prayer: Gracious Shepherd, your voice is gentle and steady — a whisper that calms my storms and guides my heart. I ask for the grace to stop, to quiet the noise, and to listen to your call. Forgive me for the times I have closed my ears to you. Tune my heart to your frequency, that I might recognize your whisper above the noise of this world. Teach me to distinguish your voice from all others, and give me a willing heart to follow where you lead. I am listening, Lord. Speak. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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## The Shepherd's Voice

Sunday, April 26, 2026

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

John 10:1-14

Way back in the year 2000, there was a movie titled, *What Women Want*. In the movie, Nick Marshall (played by Mel Gibson) gets a whole new outlook on life when a fluke accident allows him to hear women's thoughts. Nick's mind is suddenly under assault by the thoughts and feelings of the people around him. There are voices and feelings everywhere, and he has no way to filter them out. Nick gets close to a breaking point because there is no relief from the commotion!

Imagine that the same thing happened to you. Suddenly, you can hear the thoughts and comprehend the feelings of those who walk by you on the street, or who sit beside you at work, or who stand behind you in the checkout lane. Imagine that you heard and felt whatever was on their mind. It would be agonizing and exhausting to grapple with other people's worries about work and family life, to struggle with their guilt, or to agonize over their questionable decisions.

To be hit with such an amount of information would be unbearable. How would you begin to process it all? Your mind would be so filled with noise that there would be no time or space to consider your own thoughts and feelings. Living in that preputial buzz of noise and busyness would drive us to the brink of insanity. It would be like living in a swarm of locusts inside your head! Imagine the struggle to comprehend which voice to listen to and trust in an endlessly noisy world. Am I crazy, or does that sound like the world we live in right now?

While we (thankfully) might not be able to comprehend the thoughts of others or feel their emotions, our minds are no less harangued with noise. We may not be able to hear the innermost thoughts of others, but there are still countless voices vying for our attention. We live in the middle of a swarm, and the surreal thing is that we are so accustomed to the constant chatter, so anesthetized to the incessant buzz that we do not even realize we are going deaf to the voices that matter.

It can be difficult to sort through all the inessential noise, to know who to listen to, and to filter out the harmful, destructive voices that clamor to be heard: voices that criticize and contradict one another; voices that claim to be the true source of knowledge and the wellspring of life; voices that call us to trust them, follow them, and obey them. There is a