

Listen to My Voice

Faith Resurrected: Part 3 “Listen to My Voice”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – April 25, 2021

4th Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

Reflection: Psalm 23

Greeting: Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

Prayer: Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, by the renewing of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. (Psalm 23 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 23 and we hear of comfort and safety. That even in times of distress, God is with us. That the Lord is greater than any fears we may have. How have you seen your cup overflow? Do you believe that God’s mercy and goodness is always with you? How do we invite others to the table to share in God’s steadfast love? How do we share in the joy of our Risen Savior?

Prayer: O God, our shepherd, our gate, our lamb: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your pasture. Guide us to your clear streams, and tame the wolf at our gate; hear our prayers and have mercy, through Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 4, verses 5 through 12.

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:5-12 NRSV)*

Our next reading is from 1 John chapter 3, verses 16 through 24.

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. (1 John 3:16-24 NRSV)*

Our last reading is from John chapter 10, verses 11 through 18.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father." (John 10:11-18 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We continue our Easter series entitled “Faith Resurrected” with our next message “Listen to My Voice.” Every message in this series is going to be using a phrase from the Gospel reading for that week. This week, we look at what it means to listen to Christ and to follow. And we get the opening for this in our gospel reading for today. We have the familiar story of the Good Shepherd which we have discussed before. And one of the things that stands out is that Christ is calling people to a life of action. When Jesus is talking, he talks about how those of his flock will know him, and that they will follow, that they will do what he asks. And that there are others that the ones he's talking to don't know but they will be part of the flock, because they will listen to his voice. They too will do what he has asked. That there will be one flock with one shepherd, our risen Savior, Jesus Christ, who has the power to lay down his life and take it up again. We follow him because we know that he is the truth and the light. We follow him because he has shown already that he is the one that cares for us, that loves us.

We are reminded of this in John's first letter. Because when John is talking about what it is that we do to show that we follow Christ, is that we are willing to follow his example. Because Christ laid down his life for us, we should be willing to lay down our lives for one another. And that we show our love for one another in truth and action. That when we do what Christ has commanded that we will know that we are with him and that we are following him, that we are listening to his voice. And what has he commanded? That we believe in him, we believe in God, and we love one another. And when this resides in us our hearts will be right.

We see this in action in our reading from Acts. Peter and John are being interrogated over what power, what name they have been healing by. And Peter declares if they've been doing good deeds, those questioning should know that they're doing good because they follow Christ. That that's the name that gives them the power. That is who they follow. That is who taught them, and who leads them. That they listened to what Christ taught them and told them, and so they go and do. And that is why they do good, to help one another to love each other.

Today's readings make the case that if we listen to Christ's voice, that if we follow him as our shepherd, it means that we do good. That it's not just what we say to people. That it is what we say and what we do. That people should know us by our love, not by our proclamations, not by our words. That people should be able to see the love that we have without having to hear an explanation. That they should know our love and want to know for what reason we love. The simplest reason is that because we love Christ, we love each other, because the love of Christ dwells within us. That when we follow Christ, we follow in love and we serve in love. That if we know Christ in our hearts then we know the love that he has for us and the power that he has had in our lives. That our risen Savior can conquer all. That he laid down his life to conquer death. That he rose to conquer sin and death, and to give us life everlasting. That everything he did was out of a great love for us. To demonstrate the kind of love that we need to be able to have.

It's in that love that we have to reside. In Christ's love. Living a life in Christ, guided by those two great commandments: to love God and to love one another. As John Wesley has been paraphrased, that we do this by trying to do no harm, to do good, and to stay in love with God. We stay in love with God by doing everything that God has asked. That we come here together to strengthen each other in that love. That we come here together that we may celebrate that love. That we may help the weak when they are low. That when we are strong, we share our strength. When we are weak, we find strength in each other, because there we find the strength of Christ lifting us up to guide us and lead us in love. All because we listen to his voice. We are willing to follow. That we remember that we are one flock following one shepherd. No matter how often people will want to divide us up, the truth is that no matter what we do, it must be in Christ. That we believe in him because we know him. That our hearts confirm this for us, that when we know him and we love him in our hearts, it shows in our lives. In the same way, it shows when we aren't sure, and we turn away. Because then our lives aren't sure, and our love is unsteady. Instead, we are called to live boldly by faith. That we may love, not simply loving those around us, not simply loving those who are easy to love, but we love all because God loves all. We reach out to all because Christ reaches out to all. That we don't restrict ourselves to saying "well this is our flock, and we know it and we're not going to let anyone else in."

Because the thing is that we're not the shepherd. Christ is. And when Christ invites people in, it's not our job to try to turn them away. We're called to listen to his voice. One that speaks to us in truth and love. The one that reassures us that when we follow him, we will know peace and safety in our hearts. When we follow him, we will know love and be able to love. That we know he will guide us and will lead us and will protect us in everything. That Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit that he may guide us and lead us. That we may feel him in our hearts, that we may know goodness. That deep down, we'll know when we are following his commands and when we are going astray. Because as we abide in him, he abides in us. That when we allow ourselves to be led by Christ, we are led to something good. We are led to a life of love.

One of the things is that love doesn't come from lies. Love doesn't come from believing what's easy. Love doesn't come from wanting to hear things that make us feel better about what we already think. Love can be challenging. Because sometimes love pushes us in directions that we may not understand. Love can push us to do things that we may not fully comprehend. But it's love that gives us the ability to have grace. It's love that gives us the ability to forgive. It's love that gives us the ability to welcome those to the flock that we aren't sure of ourselves. And that's why we're not in charge of the flock. We're not the gatekeepers because we put our faith and our trust in the living Word of God, our risen Savior, Jesus Christ. We live our lives for his purpose. Not that we may force out the people that we think are wrong, but that we may love the people who come to Christ. Knowing that whatever God's will is, it will be

done. Even if we don't fully understand it ourselves. We just have to listen to the voice of Jesus and follow him.

What this means for me is that I have to realize there are plans that I may never comprehend. That the Lord is going to move in ways so mysterious that I may never even understand where they started and where they finished or if they even did finish. But I trust in the part that I have been given. That I have been asked to speak in love and truth, that I've been asked to act in love and truth, so that I may act in my risen Savior. That I may share the joy of his resurrection with everyone. That I may invite all in to be part of the flock. Invite them to take Christ into their hearts and into their lives that they may abide in him, that they may know peace and safety because of his love. And that I may love as he loves, so that I make care he cares. That I may forgive as I seek to be forgiven. That I may show grace as I seek grace. And that we share in this journey together as people of Christ, following Christ in love. We share this journey in love, not in judgment, not in control, but in listening to the voice of our risen Savior, knowing that he won't lead us astray. That he may lead us to places that we don't understand but wherever he leads us, we will follow, because he is good, and he is right. He is righteous. He is what we need. He is who we need. He laid down his life so that we would understand his love. He rose that we may live in his love. And so, we follow in love, knowing that whatever it is he calls us to do, that if we do it in love, we abide in him and listen to his voice. So let us always love as Christ loves, so that we may abide in the peace and the safety together of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: We are reluctant, O Author of Love, to set aside our hurt, our anger, our disappointment. Heal us with your tender touch, that we might be cleansed of all unclean thoughts, all schemes of revenge, all hope of vindictive retribution. Open our eyes to the power of love, shown to us in the unselfish sacrifice of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Faith Resurrected

Our series is *Faith Resurrected*, and each week's title is taken from the words of Christ as we explore what it means to serve a Risen Savior.

April 11th – *Come to Believe* - Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

April 18th – *You are Witnesses* – Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

April 25th – *Listen to My Voice* – Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

May 2nd – *Abide in Me* – Acts 8:26-40; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

May 9th – *I Chose You* – Acts 10:44-48; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

May 16th – *Be Sanctified* – Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

May 23rd – *He Will Guide You* – Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen	Don Stewart	Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons	Trinity Powers
Lauren Stewart	Charlie Henderson	Rosalee Chancellor	Phyllis Gable
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Family of Davey Yaw	Family of Wilma Clark
Terri Kemper	Darrell Quick	Family of Hugh Eubank	Shelley Murphy
Family of Doris Devall	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Mary White	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Donna Graham	Kevin Drum	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes			

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