

4th Sunday of Easter - John 10:27-30

An American was traveling in the Middle East. As he was driving through the countryside, he ran across two shepherds whose sheep had become intermingled as they drank from a brook. He watched as the two shepherds talked with one another, concluded their conversation then bid one another farewell and began to walk off in two different directions. As they did so, the one shepherd called out, “*Manna, manna,*” which in Arabic means, “follow me.” At the same time, the other shepherd called out the same words. The sheep lifted their heads and then divided precisely into two groups, each recognizing the voice of their shepherd.

Jesus uses this shepherding image in today’s gospel to describe his relationship with us. If he is the shepherd, then we must be the ones who recognize his voice and follow him. But what does it mean to recognize the voice of Jesus?

There is more than poetry here. Christians believe that at times in our life Christ speaks to us, calls to us, asks us to do something quite specific. What Christ asks us to do can be both dramatic and life changing.

Here is an example: It is the example of the Salwen family, a suburban family from Atlanta, Georgia. A number of years ago Kevin, the father, was driving with his fourteen-year-old daughter, Hannah, through the downtown section of the city.

They stopped at a traffic light. Hannah, looking out of the window, saw a man on the sidewalk holding a sign: “Homeless, please help!” At the same time she saw a man in a luxurious Rolls Royce waiting with them at the traffic light. She said to her father, “You know dad, if that man in the Rolls Royce had a little less nice a car, the man on the sidewalk could have a meal.”

Kevin thought for a moment about his daughter's comment and then said, "You know Hannah, if we had a little less nice a car, that man could have a meal."

That interchange between father and daughter set the Salwen family on a spiritual journey, a journey that they have recounted in their book, The Power of Half. It is called The Power of Half because after a considerable number of months of family discussion, the Salwens decided that they did not need as big a house.

They agreed to sell their house and give half of the proceeds away. Now they had a big house, six thousand square feet, and the market was better for housing in those days. They down sized and were able to give \$800,000 to a hunger effort in the African country of Ghana.

Why half? Kevin Salwen would say that half is measurable. So many times we run into a situation of real need and we say to ourselves, "I should do something." But "something" is vague, and vagueness means that often we end up doing nothing at all.

But half is a precise measure. It is a standard that can push us into action. The other advantage of half is that it is not connected to size. It does not have to be half of your house like it was for the Salwens. It could be half of a pay check or half of an evening out or half of an unexpected gift.

What was important for the Salwens was their conclusion that Christ was asking them to do something. By doing it, they were indicating that they belonged to the good shepherd.

Now, I share this example with you, not because I am recommending that you give half of something away—although if you decide to do that it could be wonderful.

I only want to offer a concrete example of someone who **heard** the voice of Christ speaking in the circumstances of their own life and chose to follow it.

If you and I have a real relationship with Jesus, we should not be surprised if occasionally Christ asks us to do something. It could be giving money to the poor. It might be reconciling with an enemy. It might be spending more time with the family, seeking out counseling, or entering a specific career.

Christ can speak to us in many ways. But if we come to church every Sunday, if we pray, if we call ourselves Christians and we never hear Christ asking us to do anything, something is wrong.

And it is unlikely that we hear nothing because Christ is not speaking. It is much more likely that we are not **listening**. Not listening is a serious flaw, because if Christ is truly our shepherd, he is calling.

So, the important question for each of us here today is what is Christ calling me to do? What is Christ asking me to do? It is a question that is essential to our relationship, because we cannot follow him if we do not recognize his voice. AMEN.