

Reflection on the Word: May 15, 2022

Psalm 23; John 10:22-30

Reality Television has become very popular in these last number of years – programs like Survivor, The Bachelor, Master Chef Canada and so many more. But among my favorites, are those relating to music or performance – like Canadian Idol, America’s Got Talent, and *The Voice*.

Take *The Voice* for instance: The producers hold open talent auditions, looking for multiple candidates who might be coached into becoming the best singer/entertainer. Successful artists then perform a “blind audition” where the coaches, famous singers of various genres, listen to each artist and choose their talent teams by pressing a red button if they hear a voice they want to coach. Pressing the red button automatically turns the coach around to see the artist, and the bottom of their chair lights up to say “I want you.”

The idea is to listen for the singer who has “the voice” that by its sweet or powerful tones can charm the coaches into selecting them.

Today’s scripture reminds us of the power and appeal of Jesus’ voice – not in a way that would make him the winner of the next best Talent Show but as one which has an authority and a message that invites people to hear and to follow.

“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me,” Jesus says in the gospel.

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There is comfort in being known, is there not? As we get better acquainted with people we become more comfortable in gathering with them, and in both asking for and giving help. And churches that make an effort to be intentional around hospitality and building community are churches that tend to grow and thrive.

Of course, there is also a challenge in being known. Because then our faults become more obvious, and our responsibilities toward each other grow.

Likewise, being known by God may also create both comfort and challenge. As people of God, we have responsibility for one another and need to live in awareness that how we act, affects others. And this may very well mean adjusting our way of doing or thinking, particularly as we live into the reality that all are known and cared for by God.

So ... how well do we do in extending welcome to the stranger; in reaching out to the isolated or lonely; in noticing those who have been pushed to the margins, neglected by family, church, or society?

As we hear the voice of Jesus, as we grow in our sense of being known and loved by God, do we not also need to make sure that others – all others – are acknowledged, welcomed, loved, befriended?

The voice of God, the voice of Jesus, calls out to us across the ages, across time and space, through the words of

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scripture, through wine and bread, through proclamation, through one another's ministry of care and compassion, consolation, hospitality and mercy.

The voice of Jesus calls out, in love, to the lost, the lonely, the forsaken, the hopeless, and the burdened. Age after age, day by day, that precious voice keeps calling and inviting us to a way of living that seeks to uphold what is right and good and loving ... a way of life that reflects God's kingdom here on earth.

And yet, as good as that sounds, it seems that VOICE is often so hard to hear.

Could it be because there are too many other voices clamoring for our attention? Or perhaps it is that we are so busy running to and fro, so caught up in a myriad of activities, so stressed by work and Covid and rising prices and a war on the other side of the world, that we have lost the ability to focus, to make space for the hearing of God's voice?

Our North American culture tends to reward busyness and productivity. Haste shapes the lives of many, and it seems we're always trying to push ourselves. Many of us can't even take a walk without being attached to our cell phones or plugged in to our iPods. What ever happened to just enjoying the sounds of nature?

Maybe we can take a few lessons from the Psalm for today ... undoubtedly the most beloved of all the psalms. It is the one that almost everyone seems to be able to recite, and even those near death or suffering from dementia can

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usually connect with the familiar words. It seems that, along with the Lord's Prayer, it is almost a part of a Christian's DNA. But do we really give it the time and reflection it is due; so that we might tap into its deep roots of meaning for daily life? That we might sense how it paints for us a picture of tranquility and peace?

Let me draw out the mood of some of its words. "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*" In essence it is saying: I am content to simply be. I need nothing. I am at peace.

"*He makes me lie down in green pastures.*" I am secure and cared for. Life is a gift which I am invited to enjoy.

"*He leads me beside still waters.*" These are words which speak to deep peace and tranquility. Think of what it feels like to rest beside a body of water that is so still it serves as a mirror for everything around it. There is a calm over everything outside, and we are able to soak all that up inside of ourselves. We are reminded that stillness and quiet are gifts God brings.

I think of words ascribed to Henry David Thoreau: 'I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude.' He knew the value of still waters ... of an aloneness that allows for awareness of God ... that enables us to hear that still, small voice of God speaking to us. Still waters invite reflection. The Shepherd leads us beside the still waters ... revives our soul ... guides us on the pathways of life enables us to journey through the shadowed times, even through all that speaks to fear and loss and death. In the Shepherd's presence our courage is heightened and we find the strength we need.

5.

In a world where busy-ness and hurry often take control of our lives; where noise and confusion keep us on edge, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calls our name, speaking tenderly to us, calling us to slow down, reminding us that we are loved, cared for, forgiven.

Have you ever driven through the mountains and seen signs alerting drivers to the runaway truck ramp? It's a track leading off the highway, and it's graded steeply upward so a runaway rig with no brakes can go barrelling onto it and be slowed down by the incline to a gradual stop. It's smart highway planning in very mountainous terrain.

And I wonder, could it be that worship provides that runaway ramp for those of us whose brakes have failed, who need to slow down and rest for awhile in a place of calm, where we sense God's peace, where our souls are revived for the activity of the week ahead?

Maybe a few minutes of hearing the Shepherd's voice in scripture and prayer, of singing a much loved hymn, of sharing in the companionship of fellow Christians, can provide that breath of new life for our souls that we so desperately need.

My friends, may we never underestimate the shaping power of the Word we hear as part of our gathering each Sunday; the renewing power of the Christ who draws us to his presence, and assures us that God is active in the world and with us; and the encouraging power experienced in community as we greet one another and seek to see Christ in each other and to live Christ in the world.

6.

Jesus does call to us. We hear his voice. And somehow, we know deep inside our being that it is HIS voice and not the loud competing noise of the world. And we do follow him—sometimes hesitantly, awkwardly, stubbornly, fearfully ... perhaps complaining about our lot ... but also at times joyously and faithfully—because Jesus presses the red button and says, like the coaches on The Voice: “I want you,” and ultimately we cannot escape his heart of love for us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.