



1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

Sunday, April 25, 2010

Sermon Texts: Psalm 23
John 10: 22-30
Acts 9: 36-43
Revelation 7: 9-17

Sermon Title: "He Knows Our Voice, Our Walk, Our Lot" or
"He Knows Us Inside Out!"

Sermon Topic: Following the Good Shepherd

Sermon Purpose: To explain how deep and personal is the relationship with the Shepherd.

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Sermon Prayer: Gracious God, open our hearts to hear Your word and guide our minds as Your Spirit flows through us, this day. As we ponder Your message in Scripture, enable us to carry it to our neighbors in the experience of life. Now, may the words of my lips and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your precious sight. In the name of Christ our Savior, we pray. Amen.

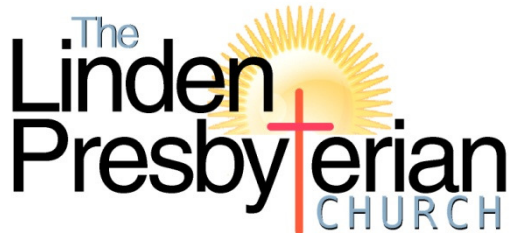
A young boy often stopped in front of a pet store to look at the animals. In fact, he stopped **so** often that one of the shop's employees had become accustomed to seeing the boy. One week, the boy would seem fixated on the puppies, another week it was the kittens, and sometimes the lizards would catch his attention. But, in all the times that the clerk saw this youngster looking through the window, the lad **never** came into the shop. He was just **mesmerized** by the display and loved to watch the animals play.

On one particular occasion, there were an abundance of puppies of many breeds in the window. The young boy watched them and watched them. On this particular afternoon, he seemed especially impressed. The employee was amazed to see the young boy finally enter the store and ask to see a particular puppy. As they went over to the window, he pointed out the puppy that interested him. The employee looked at the puppy and noticed that not only was it the most **lethargic** one, but it was also a **runt**, and it had a slight **limp**. The clerk picked up the puppy for the boy, and commented, "You know that this puppy is pretty small for its age and has a limp, and will probably **never** be able to run and catch a Frisbee and other stuff like a healthier dog would."

The boy smiled and looked at the clerk, all the while holding the squirming and whimpering puppy. "That's OK, mister" he said, "I have a hard time running, too, and I think we'll get along fine." And as the clerk looked down, he saw a steel leg brace peeking out of the boy's trouser leg. The boy and the dog were indeed well suited for each other.

The story of the young boy and his choice of puppy really captures the **essence** of our lessons, this morning: the stories of the shepherd and His voice. Jesus tells us that (as our Shepherd) He **knows**





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us ... through and through, and that He **waits** for us, and knows our **true** needs. Jesus loves and accepts us with all our **talents**, our physical and emotional **challenges**, even with all our **sins**. He loves us in **spite** of our sin, but He loves us too much to leave us **in** our sin. In the depth of our hearts, we hear His voice, and we can feel His call and His compassion.

How do we **respond** to that call? And how do we give ourselves the opportunity to hear His voice? Or do we ignore the voice, and feel left out and abandoned?

How many have ever experienced of being the last one chosen for a softball or a kickball game when we were young? There's nothing **worse** than not having your name called out as one of the first few team members. Jesus **knows** us and is **calling** to us, now; He is always calling us to Himself. Are we ready to answer? For our sake, Jesus took on humanity to become one **like** us in all things, except sin. He knows what we're made of, and He can work with us in **spite** of our weaknesses. Eventually, He eliminates them.

What's our response? The Lord wants us to say "**yes**" when we hear His voice, and then take action, following Him in His way. His promise to us (from the Father) is the gift of eternal life. Now, this is no small gift! It cost Jesus the total offering of Himself out of love for us - for you and for me. He **doesn't** promise us a life **without** problems, or **without** struggles or weaknesses, but He **does** promise to "hang in there" **with** us, to always **be** with us, and to **continue** working with us until He returns. Just as the young boy loved and searched out that one puppy that would best suit **him**, Jesus has chosen each of **us** and knows us to the very **core**. He wants to make the **best** use of us for the Kingdom of God. He is our Shepherd, and if we want to obey, we have to follow Him.

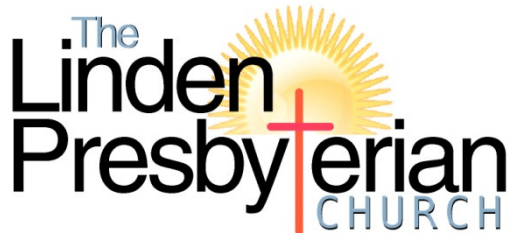
But, sometimes, following is difficult. We seem to have too many **obstacles** and not enough **energy**. Do you remember how enthusiastic you were when you were just finding out about Jesus? It may have happened when you were young and in your first Sunday School class. It may not have happened until you were in high school or college, or perhaps even as an older adult.

Not long ago, I was attending a meeting in a church one weekday afternoon in Plainfield. It was a great day! The weather was wonderful. I didn't mind the walk I had just taken. (I got a little exercise because all the parking was on the street, and I had to park a couple blocks away.) When I finished the meeting with the pastor, I walked into the sanctuary - because I decided I just needed to be alone for a few minutes. No such luck!

There I was, praying, when I heard a couple of voices and footsteps as the sanctuary door opened. The first voice I heard was a soft whisper from a grandmotherly-type saying, "Shhh! We're in church to say our prayers." Two voices chirped in what they **thought** was a whisper (but you and I both know that a child's whisper is almost louder than their normal voice). They bounded toward the front of the sanctuary to find the right place to say their prayers.

The sanctuary had three sections of pews: a wide center section and a smaller section on each side. And, of course, like all children, they would try one section – together, then separate and move to another section, then try a third. Finally, the grandmother whispered to them to find one spot and **sit there and pray**.





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Now, during all this, I had my eyes closed and was trying to picture this scene - a loving grandmother trying to instill faith in her two grandchildren. They were young, and impressionable, and I could tell this was part of a routine for them. I smiled to myself as I imagined the kids' excitement and heard their so-called "whispers."

As they prayed, I have to admit that I sneaked a peek at the scene that was unfolding before me. I saw a woman (who appeared to be in her mid-to-late 60's) sitting in the center section of pews two rows in front of me, offering her prayers. And, on each side of the sanctuary from her was a little one - a boy of about 5 on the right, and a girl not much older than three on the left. I said to myself, "They'll always remember her doing this for them." I closed my eyes and whispered a prayer for the trio in the pews in front of me. A few moments later, I heard a shuffle, and the young girl had gotten up and run to her grandmother. She ran cross the sanctuary all excited. "Grammy! Grammy, I prayed. Now can I have my candy?"

So much for my serene expectations! And the distraction of candy for a three-year-old can correspond to a stressful job, a troubled marriage, rebellious children, or messy relationships for us. It's so **easy** to get distracted by the **things** of this life, but the Gospel reminds us that the Lord will protect us from all our distress. We are to listen **for** (and listen **to**) His voice.

Do we give ourselves the opportunity to listen, to **really** listen to that inner voice that speaks of peace and comfort? Jesus has chosen each of us and has made us His special possessions. Why not run to Him out of love, today? Give yourself some quiet time and listen to His voice once again. He knows you **intimately**. He knows the location of your birthmarks and your scars. He knows what your latest concern has been. He knows whether that's the real color of your hair or something out of a bottle or a shop. He knows what's original factory equipment and what's been replaced: hip, teeth, hair, knee, elbow, and heart valves, whatever.

You see, Jesus and the Father are one; they created you and fashioned you. Let them into your life and let them lead you. Sometimes we who have filled our lives with **other** voices (work, activities, and the like) need to run to Christ, the One who gives us life. Perhaps we need the renewal of that excitement that we had when we first got to know Jesus. Run to Him today, listen to His voice, and rest in the arms of the Father.

[Let's take a couple minutes to sit quietly and listen – just **listen** – to the voice of our Creator. Listen to your Savior. Listen to the guiding Spirit. In a few moments, I'll conclude with prayer.]

Let us pray:

Gracious One, Who continually reveals Yourself to us, don't judge us by our blindness that cannot see, but by Your mercy. Help us to hear Your voice and to see You in life's commonplace things. You loom up everywhere before us, if only we could see. Your beauty is displayed in a blooming flower; through the rising and setting suns; in the kindness of human hearts; even in sorrow and suffering can we find You. You are with us in our broken dreams and unfulfilled desires. We know You are with us, here today, in the quietness of this hour; Your strength and power are knocking at our





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doors. Grant us responsive hearts. Break down all the prejudices and the bitterness, all hatreds and evil will, which would shut You out. Fill our beings with love, courage, hope, faith, and health; and send us out from this hour made-over in body, mind, and spirit, to live another day as the sheep of Your flock and the lambs of Your pasture. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

