

Straight from the "Hart"

Special Installment - March 13, 2022

Second Sunday of Lent



Opening Prayer Dear Lord, bless us that so that your intended purpose may be accomplished, and your name glorified. You are a God of mercy. We have gathered so that with your guidance we may examine our hearts and lives, increase our faith and hold fast to your unchanging love. Speak to us through all that happens today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Call to Worship

Lay Reader: Now come apart from the world with its frantic pace, to pray, reflect, and seek God's grace. Come with thoughts of the countless ways that God's steadfast love blesses all our days, and join in silent praise, Come to God's loving arms [that are] waiting to embrace all who come in hope of grace.

(abridged from "Come Away with Me" by Diane Ball)

Pastor: Our hope in his grace is solid because God has demonstrated how strong is his love for us in his Son Jesus Christ. The life of a creature is in its blood (says Leviticus), and the penalty of sin is death. Therefore, it is the shedding of blood (the giving of life) that saves us from the penalty of sin -- and so the biblical imagery drawn from of the bloody sacrificial system continues to be a strong metaphor for forgiveness and cleansing -- a gracious pardon that cleanses us from our sin, provided for by Jesus for all who believe in him. With that in mind, let's sing what we believe, and then what we believe about what Jesus' blood does for us.

Music Because We Believe

Music Nothing but the Blood

Theme

This Thursday is St. Patrick's Day. Therefore, today's "once upon a time" will be the *true* story of his biography (in brief). His birth year was some time in the 400s, to a family that had adopted the culture of the Roman Empire. When 16, Irish raiders took him from his father's villa, and he was carried into slavery. He spent 6 years in Ireland as a herdsman during which he turned with fervor to his faith. He dreamt that the ship on which he was to escape was ready, and so he fled his owner and found passage to Britain. But there he nearly starved and suffered a

second brief captivity before he was reunited with his family.

He dreamed he received a letter which was headed “The Voice of the Irish” and in it, a company of Irish were begging him to return to Ireland to be with them. He was deeply moved. He was not well educated. He doubted his fitness for the task. He was reluctant and long to respond to this call. But once he was in the mission field in Ireland, probably 450 or later, his hesitations vanished.

Utterly confident in the Lord, he journeyed far and wide, baptizing and confirming with untiring zeal. In diplomatic fashion he brought gifts to a kinglet here and a lawgiver there but accepted none from any. On at least one occasion, he was cast into chains. On another, he wrote a letter to [the British tyrant] Coroticus, who had slain, kidnapped, and mistreated many Irish Christians. Careful to deal fairly with the non-Christian Irish, he nevertheless lived in constant danger of martyrdom. He worked so hard that his religious superiors in Britain believed he was doing it just to gain higher office. But his journals demonstrate he was a most humble-minded person, constantly thanking God for making him an instrument of turning multitudes from idols and unclean things to become the people of God. As one scholar of Patrick put it, “The moral and spiritual greatness of the man shines through every stumbling sentence of his ‘rustic’ Latin.” He is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. (Abridged from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Patrick>)

Responsive Reading (L - Lay Reader, **C - Congregation**)

Pastor: I like to think it was when Saint Patrick was a herdsman that he learned that animals have to listen carefully to the guidance of the one caring for them. He too, had to listen carefully to Jesus to overcome personal setbacks and hurdles, had to listen carefully to overcome what I’d imagine hard feelings he would have toward the Irish who enslaved him, and he had to listen carefully to overcome self-doubts to be able to do all that he did. Jesus too, teaches us how important it is for us to listen to his voice of truth through the metaphor of sheep listening to him, the Good Shepherd....

L: The thief’s purpose is to steal, kill and destroy.

C: Jesus’ purpose is to give the fullest, satisfying life.

L: Jesus is the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. When a hired hand sees a wolf coming, he will abandon the sheep and run away, for they aren’t his and he isn’t their shepherd. Then the wolf attacks the flock and it scatters.

C: The hired hand runs because he has no real concern for the sheep.

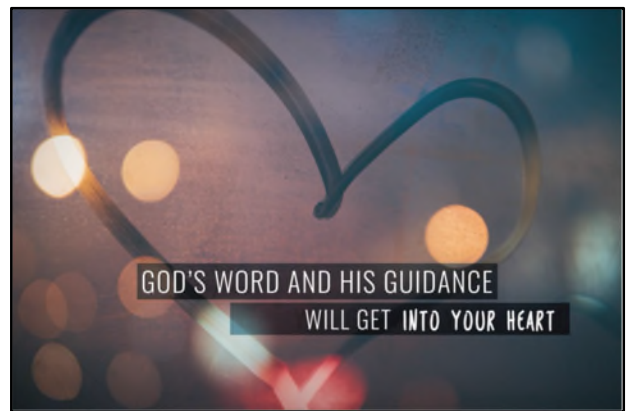
L: Jesus is the Good Shepherd and knows his own sheep and they know him. Just at his [heavenly] Father knows him and he knows the Father. He lays down his life for the sheep.

C: The Father loves Jesus because he lays down his life. But he will take it back again.

L: Jesus has other sheep in another sheepfold. He must bring them in also. They will listen to his voice.

C: Then there will be one flock with one Shepherd.

Video Words -- In case it is difficult to see the words, or simply to reinforce them: God wants you to hear him and know his voice. The secret to all of it is learning how to tune in. God speaks through the Bible. God's word and his guidance will get into your heart God speaks through authority, godly counsel, walk with the wise and become wise -- God speaks through a still, small voice, through your circumstances, Jesus came so that we can have life. If we want to experience that, we have to learn to recognize his voice [and I'll add listen to it - do what he says].



Pastor: Of course, one of the most popular and beautiful images of God's care for us as a shepherd comes from Psalm 23, promises that whether we are reclining in green pastures or walking through the deathly dangerous valleys, we don't need to be afraid because he is with us, and we know he will never let go. This song is new to us, so do the best you can with it and when we do it again next month you'll come to really love it like we do.

Music **You Never Let Go** (some of the lyrics)

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
 your perfect love is casting our fear
 And even when I'm caught in the middle of the storms of this life,
 I won't turn back. I know you are near.
 And I will fear no evil, for my God is with me.
 And if my God is with me, whom then shall I fear, whom then shall I fear?

Yes I can see a light that is coming for the heart that holds on,
 a glorious light beyond all compare. And there will be an end to these troubles,
 but until that day comes, we'll live to know you here on the earth.
 Oh no, you never let go through the calm and through the storm.
 Oh no, you never let go in ev'ry high and ev'ry low,
 Oh no, you never let go of me...

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And if he never lets go of us in high times and low times, and all he does to care
 for us, then it only makes sense that we would want to give our hearts to him.

Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing --

Music I Give you My Heart

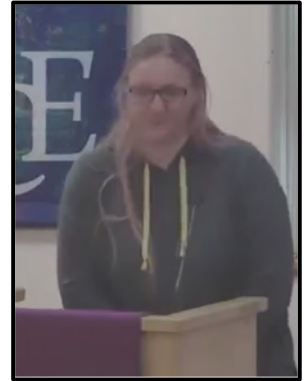
Prayers Dear God of peace, we relax in you because you are the strength of our
 life and you are more powerful than anything that may happen to us in this world.
 Even though temptation sets up camp around us, even though it seems disaster
 looks for every opportunity to rise up against us, we have set our confidence in
 you. You shelter us and protect us and put us on stable ground.

We continue to seek after you, to behold your beauty, to inquire of you our spiritual
 progress toward you. This is why we gather to sing to you, pray to you, read and learn more about you.
 Teach us your ways so that we may experience your goodness.



We muster our strength and courage and wait for your answers. **Praises and Petitions,** * We continue
 to pray for Jim Mallott * for Gar Lemon, * for Julie Evans, for Bruce Harton, for
 Beverly Wilkinson, * For the Gordonier's cousins Ray & Kathie with various
 ongoing health problems, * for Bill Wycoff, who was briefly hospitalized this past
 week. * And Lord, we also continue to pray for a quick resolution for peace in the
 Ukraine, * we give thanks for Pat Schleh's niece Melinda, who's breathing
 problems have improved, * and Pat's friend Barb, who is recovering from shoulder
 surgery, * and we also pray for those people and situations who have not been
 named today except in our hearts and minds. We lift before you the desires of our
 hearts in the next moment of **SILENCE** Now Lord continue to shape us as we
 respond to you through simplicity and prayer, sharpen our hunger for your
 friendship and our thirst for the living water of life offered through Jesus; that we
 may be fruitful servants within your creation, to build our relationship with you and
 in so doing being transformed to live as Jesus taught us to pray **LORD'S PRAYER**

Bible Intro Jesus heals a man blind from birth. Some recognized him as the blind beggar, but others thought he just looked similar. The man kept saying that he was that man. They asked him for details. The man described how Jesus had healed him. Since it took place on Sabbath, they took him to the Pharisees. The Pharisees interrogated the man, trying to deny he was the blind man. But when it became clear that they could not deny that the man was healed, they pushed him to discredit Jesus. They said, “Give God the glory, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner.” The man replied, “I don’t know if he is a sinner or not, all I know is that I was blind and now I see.” So they questioned his story all over again. The man replied, “Were you not *listening*? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”



Then they cursed him, and said, “We are disciples of Moses. We know God spoke to him, but we don’t even know where this man (Jesus) comes from.” To which the man replied, “If this man were not from God, he could not have done it.” They threw him out of the synagogue for daring to try and teach them.

Jesus caught up with him and told him he was the Son of Man. The man believed and worshiped him. Then Jesus said, “I entered this world to give sight to the blind and show those who think they see that they are blind.”

Pharisees standing nearby heard, “Are you saying we are blind?”

Jesus replied, “If you were, you wouldn’t be guilty, but you are guilty because you claim you can see.”

And now Jesus continues to critique the corrupt spiritual leaders for not being true shepherds of the people and changing the metaphor from sight to hearing. He says,

Bible Reading

“What if someone does not enter the sheep pen through a gate but climbs in another way? Anyone refusing to walk through the gate, who sneaks over the wall, must surely be a thief and a robber! A [true] shepherd comes through the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him. The sheep recognize and listen to his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. He walks ahead of them; and they follow him, for they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run from him, for they don’t know a stranger’s voice.”

John 10:2-5 (TLB, NIRV, NLT)

Review - Brick We continue a series on the foundational building blocks of establishing and maintaining a rock-solid relationship with God. * On Ash Wednesday, we began with the brick of getting a true vision of Jesus and what he came to do. Last week, we added the brick of knowing God personally -- to soak up as much information as we can about Jesus, about God -- not so we are religiously intellectually accomplished; but so that we can come to know him personally, know who he is, understand what he wants of us, and what we can expect of Him; just like we do with any human relationship, and we don't do it out of obligation; but out of strengthening of our love relationship with Him; and this week, we add one of the ways we get to know someone -- is by careful listening to the other. [Add brick 3 to the table]



In the case of God, listening may take a bit more practice as in these days, as he speaks to us differently than we speak to each other. Therefore, we pray that we can open our hearts so we can see him for who he is in all of his glory and all of his holiness, as we often read in the Bible -- the angels about him saying and singing of his glorious and holy nature, and we want to do that too. Let's sing before the sermon --

Music Open the Eyes of My Heart

Sermon Established: By Listening

There is an old story – probably many stories - about a dog that gets loose on the field, and so many people are calling to it from so many different directions that it becomes confused and doesn't know where to run. As a result, they began chasing it -- and then the real adventure begins! Sometimes, life can get like that. We are uncertain about our situation, but everyone else around us (often with limited knowledge about the situation) thinks they know exactly what we should do. As one TV character put it, "I've been so inundated with everyone's opinions on how I should feel and what I should do, I haven't been able to actually process it myself." (Ellie Bishop on NCIS 13:10 "Blood Brothers") But if, like Saint Patrick, we can learn to distinguish God's voice, he will help us process our life in a way that leads to a path that we can take with confidence.

Someone said that the common perception is that if you talk to God, you are spiritual, but if God talks to you, then something is going “funny”. These people think God doesn’t speak (or speak any longer). But the reading makes it clear (John 10:16) that if we are going to remain established in the love of God, like in any relationship, we must listen; and listening implies that God is speaking, and that his people know his voice. Maybe some have just forgotten how to listen.

After one Ash Wednesday service a group of us went out to a restaurant. While there, someone received a video call -- I think it was from a parishioner who had recently moved across country. The technology made it reasonably easy to see him on that table – and wave to him and him to us -- and to sense the caller’s presence there with us, but the background din of the room made it impossible for us to hear any conversation on that tablet several people away.

Similarly, we may know God is here, but there is often too much “noise” in our life that drowns him out. I’m using “noise” in the technical “communication theory” sense of the word. Noise is ANYTHING within the sender, within the receiver, or anything between the sender and receiver that interferes with the accuracy of the fullness of the message.



It can be static, it could be my mic cutting out all of the time, it could be if you are uncomfortably hot or cold -- it can interfere with your ability to listen well. I remember a story of Phineas Bresee, founder of the Nazarene church. At the time, he was a Methodist preacher in Iowa in the early 1900s. He was preaching to a congregation that had huddled around the heating stove in the back of the sanctuary. It was 20 below outside and when he gave the altar call, and there was no way anyone was going to leave that stove and come forward to pray...

People are of different generations and grew up in different regions and words do not always mean the same thing to each of us and that can create confusion. Hunger or tiredness of the speaker (or listener) can distract from presenting or receiving the words well. Pain can also be a barrier. I know that if I hit my thumb with a sledge hammer, I may hear what others say, but it isn’t really going to sink in because all you can think about is the pain that I am feeling. We were talking in coffee hour recently about the distraction of bats swooping around the sanctuary,

sometimes even between myself and the manuscript when I was preaching -- some people confess they didn't really hear me because they were under the pew. It gets in the way.

Whatever we are experiencing in life -- not just in the moment of the communication -- but everything we bring with us from the weeks past or weeks ahead (or longer) on either side or anything in the environment in-between during the communication can distract, interfere, even block effective communication. We know this because we often joke about it -- or sometimes it isn't a joke -- about the "selective hearing" of another. Though it may not really be a deliberate, intentional "selection, or choice" of the one who didn't hear.

When it comes to God, the main "noise" is pressing, or even negative life situations, our lack of time, our amount of stress -- and that he isn't physically in the room with us in the same way Jesus was in the room with his disciples, or on the mountain with them, or in the boat with them; and his voice isn't usually -- though there are exceptions with some people, as audible as my voice is for you right now. The challenge is for us is, as much as possible, set aside what is within us, and remove what is between us, enabling us to better tune in to what he is trying to say to us.

And tuning in is important because there are voices of thieves and robbers and hired hands that, if listened to, may well leave us vulnerable to the dangers of wolves (see John 10:10-12) and foxes and other destructive forces that may rob us of that eternal life, that quality of life that Jesus came to offer us and all people.

Jesus is the good shepherd. In those days in the Middle East, when a lamb is born, the shepherd would take the lamb, and carry it around his neck on his shoulders and walk around with it for several days. The lamb would become comfortable, and trust, and know his shepherd's voice above all others, and would respond any time he calls, and would follow him because he trusted him. And Jesus wants to do that with us and lead us, then to a quality-filled abundant life. So the question remains, how do we learn to recognize his voice?

First of all, as I've already said, we first need to try to set aside distractions... It is easier said than done. One of our Faith We

<p>Listening to the right voice (LRV): * Set aside distractions</p>
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Sing hymns calls us to create room in our life by clearing ourselves from the crowded, cluttered, chaos in which we tend to live and find a quiet center. It isn't just the heavy stresses and distractions and pains; it can be simple distractions as

well. When encouraging quiet time in a youth group years ago, one answered that he was never without sound. Sometimes, quiet prayer feels more like empty awkwardness. It did for him. In one fictional TV episode, they were talking about something that is a real phenomenon. A rattled witness about “had a stroke” because the agents confiscated her phone. A doctor in the show later explained she had nomophobia – (a shortened acronym for “no mobile phone”) a fear of no mobile phone. It is an anxiety that results from having no mobile phone access -- and the doctor then characterized that as a “sad reflection on our inability to disconnect” from things. (NCIS 13:5 “Lockdown”). We can’t connect well if all the other lines of our life are always open and flooding us. It isn’t that there isn’t an interaction of our spiritual life and the rest of life -- but sometimes the only way to re-focus and channel our energy for life is to get away from life’s preoccupations and habits and routines for a time. Jesus escaped to mountains and gardens on a regular basis, and that is what allowed him to live most fully when he was with others. Of course, even when we try, things as simple as the day’s to-do-list could keep popping into our mind, right? *Oh, I can’t forget that* so the mind just keeps going back to it and can’t get that item to be quiet. My Evangelism professor, Dr. Shaver, recommends when we get away, we do so with a paper and pen – then those types of distractions, we can simply write them down, and then we don’t have to worry about forgetting them, and then our mind can set it aside, and that frees us to concentrate on what we are trying to do.

Also, some things that keep popping up in our head that we may view as a distraction -- but it **may** also be that it keeps coming back because God is wanting us to work on this thing, but we want to set it aside and not deal with it, so we call it a distraction. We need to be careful about that too.

Having set aside distractions the best we can, the primary way to listen for God is through his LRV: * Set aside distractions Bible. Through it we hear God speaking to his people, through it we see the Son of God living among people. The more you know the heart of the Bible, the more you know God’s love letter to the world, the more you will understand what he is trying to say to our lives today.

Just be careful of proof texting – I like to day, if you take the text out of the context, sometimes you are left with a con. The Pharisees had become experts in lifting verses out of their culture and their context and constructing a religion that no longer spoke God’s message (according to Jesus).

Also be careful of treating the Bible like a magic 8 ball. Although God has and can use any method, letting the Bible fall open and randomly pointing to a verse out of context to give you direction for the day or for life is probably not the best way to use it. There are exceptions of course, I've heard stories of how that has worked, but I would not try making it the standard practice of finding God's will.

Step back and look at the big picture of the Bible, and you will discover that the more you get into God's word, the more God's word will get into you, and you will sense more and more how it relevantly applies to our lives right now in 2022.

I have talked about getting away alone – but that isn't the only way we hear God's voice. The Shepherd has

LRV: * Mature examples

a flock, not solitary sheep. The mature sheep teach the young sheep how to be members of the flock too. Surrounding ourselves with and picking the brain and heart of people who are mature in the faith and admirable examples of humanity, and their wisdom can greatly assist us in discovering what God may be telling us, (that includes those trustworthy authors and leaders who can share the faith through books, blogs, and other multi-media, through whatever form you like to use). As Jesus' good shepherd-ly example demonstrated for the disciples who God was and what he was about and how to live a full life -- so mature Christians become examples for each other and those who are newer to the faith. Remember that as we mature, we are becoming examples too – even as we are moving on to maturity. That should give us pause -- to consider how we are living our lives, about being intentional about our growth, for as Paul told the young Titus, "in everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us." (Titus 2:7-8 (NIV))

Another way God speaks to us is through what is commonly called the "still, small voice".

LRV * Gut checks and prompts

One of my old Sunday School teachers called it a "fuzz buster" -- which was a fad that goes way back, when it was popular for people to buy radar detectors so they would know if a police car was in the area and so they could slow down and not get caught speeding. Remember those? I don't know if that is very good of an analogy for the Holy Spirit. Jesus didn't send the Spirit to us so the Spirit can help us "not get caught". But if we are sensitive and open to him, when we are about to do something inadvisable, like a fuzz buster he will help us feel it in our gut, or in

our head -- and we still have a choice, but we will be warned to not take this opportunity that in the short or long run, may rob, kill, or destroy the fullness of our life.

While Paul was on a missionary trip, the Spirit kept them from going to Asia, assumingly for their best interest, and the best interest of the Gospel. But as we have said in recent weeks, Jesus is more proactive, not just about avoiding evil and potential problems, but also about doing good -- So the Spirit moves Paul to change plans and go to Macedonia, where he meets Lydia (the Bible doesn't say but probably an answer to her prayers as well) and the mission team founded one of Paul's favorite churches in Philippi because of that Spirit led move, and change of plans. (See Acts 16:6,10; 11:12)

There are times that people or activities might come to our minds -- and we might stop to reach out to that person, send a check to someone, do an activity that we may not have otherwise thought to do. And after the fact, we may never hear, or we may find out that our acting on those "hunches" provided what that person needed at just the right time.

One of the least reliable indicators (in my opinion) is that God speaks through circumstances. Luke doesn't **LRV * Circumstances** explain whether the Spirit's prevention of the Asian trip was the Spirit nudging Paul or a set of circumstances (what some people call "closed doors") that kept Paul from traveling that direction, and "open doors" that created the avenue to his successful trip to Philippi. The challenge is understanding whether circumstances are God saying "no" --- or the power of evil trying to hinder us from completing God's will. We often interpret "circumstantial open doors" as God clearing the way to make it "easy" for us; and "circumstantial closed doors" as God laying obstacles that make it "hard" for us to get there. If that was true all the time, and Jesus relied primarily on this method, he would have never gone to the cross, because it is not easy to go that road, and it would have been seen as "closed doors". Well, no it wasn't, it was just a hard trip he had to make. If he had considered the cross a "closed door" because it was hard, he would have missed the ultimate good he came to give to us. And then where would we be?

Instead, Jesus recognizes a voice calling him to a very difficult circumstance and follows that path because he is the Good Shepherd who came to know and be known by his people, and who would lay down his life for them (John 10:11,14b,17 (NIV)) so that they will know voice and find real life -- if we will only listen. If we

want to know the voice of God, we have to spend time with God. And the more we spend time with Him, the more we'll be able to recognize his voice when He speaks to us.

This is why the sanctuary is being opened a couple times a week. Not that it couldn't be done at home or in your car or other places, but it gives an opportunity to do something special that is not in a location where we already have normal routines and habits and patterns, and I've noticed that if you go to the same place, you tend to do the same things you do in that place all the time. So the sanctuary is open because that is what we do here – pray and meditate and do spiritual things, but if that doesn't work for you there are options. But however, or wherever it is done -- spend time with God and you'll better know the voice of God, and if you better know the voice of God, you'll be able to more faithfully follow where he leads.

Closing Prayer Let's pray. Lord, Mark Twain humorously reminded us that most of us are bothered by Bible passages we don't understand, but he was more troubled by the passages he did understand. Meaning our greatest concern is to learn more, and to be able to follow through in the truth you teach us that we do understand. And the more we learn, the more we will begin to understand your Spirit's fine tuning of daily opportunities and decisions. The more you grow us, the more we'll be able to tune in to you, and the more we will grow again -- kind of like a snowball effect that builds on itself, growing and learning, learning and growing... increasingly building our lives to maturity. Help us be persistent in seeking you and remaining open and obedient to faithfully following your leading voice. Amen.

Our closing song speaks of one who listens when we call, who stands beside and speaks to us in the storms, and who listens when we call to him -- who has demonstrated his passion for truth, his loving sacrifice for us, and his power to help us like no one else can. Let's stand and sing --

Music Jesus

Blessing Now go - established in the rock solid love of God by [listening] and nurturing a growing relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who leads our old lives to the cross, and through it delivers us to new and eternal life. Amen.