

## The Message for Sunday, April 25, 2010

**Title:** “Listening Like Sheep”

**Scripture:** John 10:22-30

**I. We know your voice...** Walter Damrosch (1862-1950) was a famous composer and conductor who also served as NBC’s music director from 1928-1942. He was best known for hosting a radio show called, “Music Appreciation Hour.” It was a popular series of radio lectures on classical music. His show was broadcast during school hours; and teachers were given textbooks and worksheets by NBC so they could turn on a radio in the classroom and use the show to teach the children.

As you might imagine, it was a special treat to the students in the 1930’s and early 1940’s to have their school day interrupted with a radio program. He always started his radio show with, “Good morning, my dear children.” Damrosch would then play classical music and tell his audience about each piece of music.

In the early 1940’s, Mr. Damrosch was asked by the headmaster of a school to come and talk to the students. It made the students fidget to see an old man sitting on the stage. They had no idea who it was; but they thought they were in for a long, boring speech.

Mr. Damrosch stood up, smiled, and then simply said, “Good morning, my dear children.” Immediately the whole room was in an uproar. The children clapped and cheered.

Later, Mr. Damrosch asked why they had cheered. They did not know him. But, the headmaster told him, “We know your voice.” (adapted from “And they shall hear my voice,” *Wicket Gate Magazine*, June 5, 2002, [www.Wicketgate.co.uk](http://www.Wicketgate.co.uk), found at “Jesus is Ovine Lingual,” 5/2/2004, [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com))

**II. Voices...** Isn’t it amazing how we all speak the same language; but each of us speaks it so distinctively that most of us are recognizable! When I was a young child, there was no television, so all of my entertainment came from the radio or from 78 rpm records. I grew up knowing some of the most famous voices of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

One of my favorites was Charles Laughton. He read Bible stories on records. And who could forget a voice like Orson Welles? Did you ever hear of Brace Beemer? The name might not be familiar, but he was one of the radio voices of the Lone Ranger when I was a boy. ‘Or, what about Earl Nightingale? He was a motivational speaker, and had the most widely broadcast radio show ever called, “Our Changing World.” But, I knew him first as the voice of one of my personal heroes, Sky King.

If you grew up in the 1960’s, you knew the voice of Bugs Bunny because of Mel Blanc. Today, a whole host of characters are known just as well by their voices as by their faces, including the cast of Shrek: Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, and Cameron Diaz. But, did you ever wonder about the voice of the Shepherd? The Gospel of John says that His sheep know His voice.

John tells us that Jesus once visited Jerusalem during the festival of the Dedication. You and I know that festival as Hanukkah. Jesus was up at the Temple and found

himself surrounded by people. They blurted out, “How long will you keep us in suspense? Just tell us plainly if you are the Messiah.”

Jesus then said to them, “I have told you, and you don’t believe me.” And then he said, “You must not be of my sheep, because my sheep hear my voice.”

Now, that raises some questions.

**III. Who is your shepherd?...** This first question is this: “*Who is your shepherd?*” A few years back, the *Denver Post* ran an article on the census in Great Britain. One of their questions concerned religious affiliation. So many people were answering that question with “Jedi Knight” that they decided to create a category for it. In case it has been a while since you saw a “Star Wars” movie, the Jedi Knights are fictional warriors who battle evil and who believe in “The Force.” (Based on a report in the *Denver Post*, October 12, 2001, 2A, and found in “Tracking the Sheep,” 4/29/2007, [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com))

It is hard to believe that some people take the Jedi’s seriously. So, I looked it up. There *is* a “Church of Jediism,” and it has an official 501(c)3 status. I find it absolutely amazing that some people are finding answers to ultimate questions in a fictitious spirituality. But, it serves to illustrate what I believe is a basic human need: People not only need a shepherd; they will look for one. People look beyond human nature for an explanation of the universe and what sustains it. Some people are willing to be led by a shepherd created by a successful film maker—who, frankly, has apparently had a huge impact on the minds of Americans for the past thirty years. And, of course, there are many other shepherds people have chosen to follow.

In the 1830’s, hundreds of thousands of people started following William Miller who believed that Christ would come again in 1843. When Christ did not come, he recalculated and said that it would be in 1844. Over 50,000 people followed him until the end of 1844; and when Christ did not come, most left the movement for their old churches.

In the 1970’s, Jim Jones, the leader of The Peoples’ Temple in Guyana assembled a religious community who was so mesmerized by him that they all followed him to their deaths by drinking Kool Aid laced with poison. That movement was so powerful that if you were to type, “Kool Aid,” in the search engine on your computer today, the second or third hit would be a reference to the phrase, “”Drinking the Kool Aid.”

There will always be a William Miller or Jim Jones who attempts to lead people into a dark pastures. But, I can think of more insidious shepherds who lead people down questionable and often destructive paths every day. I think of Bernie Madoff, or Hollywood celebrities who tout Scientology, or a whole list who have been public about their atheism: People like Woody Allen, Jack Nicholson and Keanu Reeves. ([http://www.celebatheists.com/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://www.celebatheists.com/wiki/Main_Page))

And yet, many of the shepherds who lead us down wrong paths are nameless. And, of that number I include the untold number of people who make illegal drugs available to countless millions all across America. There is probably no more villainous shepherd in the world than the drug dealer.

Or, if you really want to know who your shepherd is, follow your money.

Earlier in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of John we read where Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)

As a little boy, one of the first pieces of scripture I memorized was Psalm 23. It begins, “The Lord is my shepherd.” I am who I am today because the shepherd I have chosen to follow is Jesus Christ.

**IV. Would you hear him?...** The second question I want to ask is this: **“If the Shepherd were to speak to you, would you hear Him?”** Famous evangelist, D. L. Moody, used to hold summer conferences at his school in Northfield, Massachusetts. Because of her famous, missionary family going back three generations, Dr. Moody invited little Ida Scudder (1870-1960) to be a student. Little Ida had seen all of the misery and disease she intended to witness. She had made up her mind that she was not going to be a missionary. Instead, she was going to enjoy life her own way; and she did, filling her life with fun and pranks.

There are plenty of stories about her, including the time she “borrowed” the horse and carriage from the German professor and went joy riding! Things like this prompted her classmates to vote her the most popular person in her class. Her goal was to remain in the United States and get married.

One day, she received word that her mother had taken ill. She was asked to go back to India to help her family in the medical mission, there. While she was there, she saw the horrible suffering of the Indian women, who because of cultural taboos, would not go to a male doctor. Not even her own medical missionary father, could help these women. And it was then that she finally **heard the voice of the Shepherd**.

Ida he returned to the United States and enrolled in the first class of students at Cornell University that accepted females (1899). When she graduated, she returned to India where she spent the rest of her life ministering to the plight of Indian women. She eventually started one of Asia’s foremost teaching hospitals, the Christian Medical College and Hospital at Vellore, India. She died at the age of ninety in southern India, having never married, but having touched the lives of millions. Such was her popularity and notoriety that she once received a letter simply addressed, “Dr. Ida, India.” (From a number of sources, including autobiographical sources; also see “A Lost Generation,” by Russell L. Mast, presented on September 25, 1960, at Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, Kansas. The text was published in a book of sermons, Lost and Found (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1963). Found in *Mennonite Life*, June 2001, vol. 56 no. 2 @ [http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2001june/mast\\_sermon.php](http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2001june/mast_sermon.php))

I believe that the Shepherd has a word for every one of us. It is not necessarily the same word, because we are all created different. We all have different abilities. But, God has placed a call on every one of us. I know how God placed a call on my heart. I have mentioned before how the call to ministry used to interrupt my relatively carefree life. I turned a deaf ear on that call; and when I did hear, I pretended **incapacitation**: “Lord, I don’t know how you expect me to do what a pastor does.”

I think the thing that clinched it for me was delivering food with a Key Club project while in high school. I heard the voice of the shepherd on the day I carried a box of food to a man who was living in a cinder-block hut that was so small no one could have stood up in it. It affected me so much that I realized I must answer the call to a hurting world.

If the shepherd were to speak to you today, would you hear Him?

**V. Right now...** The third question I want to ask is this: *“What is the Shepherd saying to you, right now?”* Before you start listening, let me warn you. Jesus says some pretty radical things.

In his autobiography, poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko (b. 1933), tells how, in Moscow in 1941, the streets were lined with people, mostly women, waiting for a great parade of German prisoners of war. The atmosphere of hatred was distinct. Nearly every woman there had lost a husband, a father, a brother or a son to the German invasion of Russia. This was their chance to vent some of their hatred.

As the Germans came into view, Yevtushenko says, they were “... thin, unshaven, wearing dirty, bloodstained bandages, hobbling on crutches, or leaning on the shoulders of their fellow soldiers.... The streets became dead silent. An old woman pushed through the crowd, past the police cordon and, taking something from her coat, pushed it into the pocket of an exhausted soldier: A crust of black bread. And now, suddenly from every side, women were running towards the soldiers, pushing into their hands bread, cigarettes, whatever they had. The soldiers were no longer enemies. They were people.” (Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *Almost at the End* [New York: H. Holt and Company, 1987]. p. 25. Quoted in “Don’t Count Sheep,” 4/21/1991, [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com))

Jesus says, “Love your enemies.” Is Jesus saying something like that to you right now? Is the Shepherd asking you to mend the breach that has existed between you and someone you used to love? Has Jesus asked you to have a little more discipline on Sunday morning when it comes time to decide whether or not you are going to come to church? Has the Shepherd asked you to give up those destructive habits that have a hold on your life? What is the Shepherd saying to you right now?

**VI. Sheep...** Patrick Gray tells the story about a preacher who was teaching a Sunday school class about the 23rd Psalm. He told the children about sheep: That they were not very smart and needed lots of guidance; and that a shepherd’s job was to stay close to the sheep, protect them from wild animals and keep them from wandering off and doing dumb things that would get them hurt or killed. He pointed to the little children in the room and said that they were the sheep and needed lots of guidance.

Then the preacher put his hands out to the side, palms up in a dramatic gesture, and with raised eyebrows asked the children, “If you are the sheep, then who is the shepherd?”

There was an awkward silence. Then one little girl said, “Jesus. Jesus is the shepherd.”

The preacher was caught a little off guard and said to her, “Well, then, who am I?”

The little girl thought for a moment, and then said with a shrug, “I guess you must be the sheep dog.” (Patrick T. Gray, [theadvent.org/sermons/pg050706.htm](http://theadvent.org/sermons/pg050706.htm). Retrieved October 17, 2006. Tracking the Sheep, 4/29/2007, [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com))

It is o.k. to be the sheep dog. The real questions are: Who is your shepherd? If the shepherd were to speak to you would you hear him? And, what is the shepherd saying to you right now? Amen.

The Rev. Michael O’Bannon, Pastor