

John 10: 22-30

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT HOW VERY IMPORTANT A NAME CAN BE? THINK OF YOUR OWN NAME WHICH WAS GIVEN TO YOU WHEN YOU WERE BORN—A NAME FOR YOU TO BE KNOWN BY THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE. YOUR NAME IS OFTEN THE FIRST THING SOMEONE ASKS WHEN THEY MEET YOU OR ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL WHEN THE TEACHER CALLS ON YOU FOR THE FIRST TIME. AND IT'S THE EASIEST WAY FOR FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND OTHERS TO ADDRESS YOU AND REFER TO YOU. TODAY WE HAVE THE PRIVILEGE TO WITNESS THE BAPTISM OF BEAU MATTHEW AS HIS NAME IS RECORDED IN GOD'S BOOK OF LIFE.

NICK NAMES ARE OFTEN ENDEARMENTS. NAMES SOMETIMES ESTABLISH AUTHORITY. THERE'S THE STORY OF AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE AT SEA OVER THE RADIO WAVES. A VOICE SAYS, "CHANGE YOUR COURSE." AND ANOTHER VOICE COMES BACK WITH, "NO, I AM A BATTLESHIP. YOU CHANGE YOUR COURSE." AND AFTER SEVERAL EXCHANGES THE VOICE FROM ONE SIDE CONTINUES WITH CLAIMING AUTHORITY, "I AM THE CAPTAIN OF THE BATTLESHIP." BUT THE REPLY CAME BACK, "I AM THE LIGHTHOUSE. CHANGE YOUR COURSE. YOU ARE HEADED TO DANGER."

NAMES HELP US IDENTIFY OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS---MOM, DAD, GRANDMA, GRANDPA, DOCTORS, COACHES.

SOME THINGS IN OUR GOSPEL LESSON ARE VERY CLEAR. IT WAS THE FESTIVAL OF DEDICATION. JESUS WAS WALKING ON THE PORTICO OF SOLOMON. THE ACTS, THE MIRACLES, THE HEALINGS, THE RAISING THE DEAD, THE CASTING OUT OF DEMONS, ALL DONE IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, ALL DONE IN THE NAME OF GOD.

JESUS HAD JUST CLEARLY MADE A STATEMENT. HE HAD JUST TOLD THEM HE IS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD. HE IS ONE WITH GOD. HE IS THE SHEPHERD OF THE FLOCK, AND THE FLOCK ARE THOSE WHO HEAR HIS VOICE AND FOLLOW HIM.

IT IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP. HE KNOWS THEM, EACH OF THEM. HE KNOWS US BEST AND LOVES US.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT REWARD OR PUNISHMENT. SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT WHAT WE DO DETERMINES WHETHER WE GO TO HEAVEN OR HELL. THAT'S CALLED A WORK OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. NOT TRUE.

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT IF YOU GO TO CHURCH AND WRITE A CHECK EVERY WEEK YOU'RE IN THE FOLD. IT'S SIMPLY NOT TRUE. OUR GOSPEL LESSON IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP. THE RELATIONSHIP IS ABOUT LOVE...GOD'S LOVE FOR US AND OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

YOU CANNOT SAVE YOURSELF. WE CANNOT CONFESS ENOUGH. WE CANNOT REPENT ENOUGH. EACH OF US ARE SAVED BY GRACE, THE GRACE AND LOVE OF GOD.

NOW IN RESPONSE TO THAT GRACE, IN RESPONSE TO THAT LOVE, WE DO CONFESS, WE DO REPENT. WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH...ALL IN RESPONSE TO THE LOVE WE HAVE RECEIVED. IT'S ABOUT RELATIONSHIP.

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE JESUS SAYS. I KNOW THEM AND THEY FOLLOW ME.

WE LIVE IN A VERY NOISY WORLD DON'T WE. A WORLD FILLED WITH ALL KINDS OF DIFFERENT VOICES, ALL COMPETING FOR OUR ATTENTION. AND IT SEEMS DIFFICULT, IN MIDST OF ALL THIS NOISE, TO HEAR THE VOICE OF OUR SHEPHERD.

JUST THINK OF ALL THE DIFFERENT VOICES WE HAVE EACH HEARD THIS PAST WEEK. ALL COMPETING FOR OUR ATTENTION. AND SEVERAL OF THESE VOICES ARE INCREDIBLY GOOD AT CONVINCING US TO PAY ATTENTION TO THEM. THEY CREATE ADS, GEARED JUST TOWARD US. THEY CONVINCE US THAT WE NEED WHATEVER THEY ARE SELLING, TO BE SAFE, OR TO BE POPULAR, OR TO BE SUCCESSFUL, OR SIMPLY TO FEEL BETTER. MODERN TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA MEANS THAT COMPANIES KNOW US BETTER THAN EVER BEFORE AND THEY USE THAT INFORMATION TO CONVINCING US THAT WE NEED WHATEVER THEY HAVE.

SOMEONE GOOGLED THE FOLLOWING QUESTION: "IS MY PHONE LISTENING TO ME?" AND THE TOP HIT WAS A SIMPLE ANSWER: "YES, AND HERE'S HOW TO STOP IT." HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN EXPERIENCE OF TALKING TO A FRIEND ABOUT BUYING SOMETHING AND THE VERY NEXT TIME YOU WENT ON FACEBOOK, YOU SAW ADS FOR THE THING YOU WANTED TO BUY.

YES, OUR PHONES AND OTHER DEVICES ARE LISTENING TO US. THEY HEAR OUR VOICES. AND THEN THEY TRY TO SELL US STUFF. THEY KNOW US, AND ALL TOO OFTEN, WE HEAR THEIR VOICE, AND FOLLOW THEM. BUT THEY ARE FALSE SHEPHERDS, MAKING PROMISES THEY CANNOT KEEP. THERE IS ONE TRUE SHEPHERD. AND WE ARE ALL HIS SHEEP. AND TODAY, WE ARE REMINDED TO LISTEN TO HIS VOICE. BECAUSE AT THE END OF THE DAY, THERE IS ONLY ONE VOICE WE CAN TRUST; ONE VOICE THAT TRULY MATTERS TO OUR SOUL. AND THAT IS THE VOICE OF OUR SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

AT EACH OF MY PREVIOUS CONGREGATIONS WE WOULD DO A BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS EACH FALL. PEOPLE WOULD BRING THEIR PETS (ON LEASHES OR IN CAGES) TO THE SERVICE. I HAVE BLESSED DOGS, CATS, TURTLES, BIRDS, SNAKES, GERBILS, MICE. ALL OF THEM HAVE NAMES.

ONE OF MY DOGS IS A BICHON FREEZE. SHE IS 16 YEARS OLD. I BUY HER THE BEST FOOD, PAY HUGE VET BILLS (SHE IS GOING ON YEAR 3 OF HER PACE MAKER), USE THE BEST FLEA AND TICK MEDICINE. HER NAME IS DAISY. DAISY SLEEPS ANYWHERE SHE WANTS. WE HAVE A FENCED IN BACK YARD SO SHE CAN SNIFF TO HER HEART'S CONTENT. YET SOMETIMES WHEN WE ARE IN THE FRONT YARD SHE RUNS STRAIGHT AWAY FROM ME. AND I CHASE

HER. AND BECAUSE OF HER PACE MAKER SHE'S FAST. I WHEN I CATCH HER, I ASK: "DAISY, WHO WOULD LOVE YOU LIKE I DO?" WHY DID YOU RUN AWAY FROM ME?"

THERE ARE TIMES IN MY LIFE I RUN THE SAME WAY DAISY DOES, BUT I AM RUNNING FROM GOD.

I KNOW GOD LOVES ME, THAT GOD PROVIDES FOR ME, THAT GOD PROTECTS ME FROM MYSELF. I HEAR HIM CALLING MY NAME. I RECOGNIZE HIS VOICE AND YET BOLT OFF ALONE, THINKING I CAN NAVIGATE MY LIFE BETTER.

EVER DONE THAT? GOD CALLING YOUR NAME. HE KNOWS YOU. YOU ARE PART OF HIS FLOCK. YOU KNOW HIS VOICE. IT IS ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP.

WE WILL HEAR A NUMBER OF VOICES THIS COMING WEEK, ALL COMPETING FOR OUR ATTENTION. BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, JESUS SEEMS TO BE SAYING TO US, IT IS THE ONLY VOICE THAT CAN LEAD US HOME, THAT CAN LEAD US TO SAFETY. IT IS THE VOICE OF THE SHEPHERD THAT HAS CALLED US HERE THIS MORNING. IT IS THE VOICE OF THE SHEPHERD THAT CALLS US TO FOLLOW HIM. AND IT IS THE VOICE OF THE SHEPHERD THAT LEADS US HOME. IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP. AMEN.