

**Mark 6:1-6; John 10:27-28**

I think we can safely assume that the people who gathered together for worship in Nazareth were not Jesus' sheep. They did hear His voice. They listened when He got up into the pulpit to preach. But rather than follow Him, they took offense at Him. And these were baptized and confirmed church members. Well, maybe not baptized...although some may have gone out to John the Baptist. But they were circumcised. And they were confirmed--the Jewish equivalent, that is, called their Bar Mitzvah, or back then, "Reaching the Age of Majority."

These were not your drug addicts, your criminal element, your meth makers, and so forth. These were Nazareth's finest. God's people. They were, or used to be, friends and neighbors of Jesus. They grew up with Him. For nearly thirty years they rubbed shoulders with Him down at the local coffee shop. They attended the same school. They worshiped at the same synagogue. But they weren't His sheep. Their baptism, and their confirmation, and their years of service in the church would be, for them, of no value. They would not enter into life on the Last Day. They were not Jesus' sheep.

Even though you, Caitlyn, are being confirmed today, you are not the only one here. I chose your confirmation verse just for you, but the words are for all of us. Today would be your Bar Mitzvah if you were Jewish and male. But since you are Lutheran and female, it's your Confirmation Day. And I'm going to tell you today what I've been telling you all along...you are Jesus' sheep. This is not to suggest that you will never, like the people of Nazareth, become offended at Jesus. By nature He offends us. And even as baptized Christians, our sinful flesh daily takes offense at Him. We are offended that He cares how we live; what we say; how we behave; that He gives us His Law. His Law offends us. But even more, His Gospel offends us. Baptism, Holy Communion, Holy Absolution, His cross--we are offended by His truth which clearly says that we cannot save ourselves, but that He saves us by and through these things. You are not Jesus' sheep because you are always doing the right thing; because you make the right choices in your daily life. It's the Shepherd who lives that way, not the sheep. If sheep lived like that, we would not need a Shepherd...a Shepherd to lay down His life for the sheep; a Shepherd to give Baptism, and Holy Communion, and Pastors who preach and absolve sin, to His sheep.

*"My sheep,"* says Jesus, *"hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give eternal life to them."* Now we might be tempted to think that we are Jesus' sheep because we hear His voice and follow Him. But that is not true. If it was true, then what is said of the sheep must also be said of the Shepherd. If we are sheep because we hear and follow, then Jesus is the Shepherd because He knows us and gives us eternal life. But doing these things does not make Him the Shepherd. Rather, because He is the Shepherd, He does these things. And so hearing Jesus faithfully Sunday after Sunday, and following Him in your daily life does not make you a sheep. But because you are a sheep, you do these things, and you live by these things.

Not everyone is one of Jesus' sheep. The people gathered for worship in Nazareth knew who Jesus was. *"Is not this the carpenter,"* they said, *"the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joseph, and Judas, and Simon?"* They knew Jesus...from an earthly point of view. But Jesus does not say, *"My sheep know Me."* He says, *"I know them."* The five foolish virgins pounded on the door in the parable and cried, *"Lord, open up to us!"* They knew Jesus. They knew their Lord. But He did not know them. *"I never knew you,"* He says, *"Depart from Me."* *"I know My sheep,"* says Jesus.

Jesus' sheep hear His voice. And so you, Caitlyn, have been taught the catechism. And as you were being taught, you also faithfully came to God's House of Worship. And the whole time this was going

on, you were opening up your catechism at home to study, to memorize...because as one of Jesus' sheep you need to recognize the voice of the Shepherd. There are so many voices out there. Voices teaching you this and that. Voices claiming to speak for Jesus. Voices which can sound similar to Jesus' voice, but they are not His voice. Satan does not call out to you with the voice of a roaring lion. He disguises his voice to sound like your shepherd. And many sheep turn to listen. They are deceived. They think they are following Jesus through life when, in fact, it is the voice of Satan they are hearing, the voice of Satan they are following.

And so you who are sheep can never receive too much instruction in the Faith. But you can receive too little. If you think that because you are confirmed, you've got it figured out; you've sealed the deal, and now you can back off from worship, from learning, from listening, from growing, from memorizing, then realize this--it is Satan's voice telling you these things. Some people complain, "Why does confirmation class take so long?" It's not long enough. It's never long enough. This is not your graduation day. This is not the day when you can say: "Now I'm through with the catechism!" Today you confess with the church: "I am a sinful sheep, but I have a Shepherd who loves me and forgives me, who laid down His life for me, who claimed me in my baptism, and who gives Himself for me in His Holy Supper. I have been learning to recognize His voice. Now I promise that unto the day I die, I will, by His grace, keep hearing His voice and follow Him."

Jesus' sheep are not confirmands who heard His voice. "*My sheep,*" He says, "*hear My voice.*" Not 'heard in the past only,' they "hear it," He says. Satan will try, with his deceiving voice, to convince you (and he is very successful at this), that you do not need a Shepherd in the present; that you do not need to hear His voice today because you heard it yesterday; that you do not need Jesus' Supper and His forgiveness today, because you've been there and done that. But Jesus says, "*My sheep hear and they follow.*"

Now let's be clear on something...no one can be scared into becoming a sheep. The Law of God has its purpose, and Jesus' sheep hear it. They do not turn away from it as others do. Jesus commands His pastors to rebuke His sheep with the Law so that you mourn over your sinful life, so that you despair of anything in you to save yourself from perishing. But Jesus' sheep do not live by the law; they live by the Gospel. Jesus calls you His sheep and keeps you as His sheep by His holy precious Gospel--the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, coming into your ears right now...the Gospel of Holy Baptism, the Gospel of Holy Communion and Holy Absolution. And this good news--this Gospel--is for everyone. It was for the people of Nazareth, but they rejected it. Jesus died for them, but they would not grasp Him by faith; they would not live their lives in Him.

Today Jesus calls out to each and every one of you. And His sheep will listen. By His mercy, by His working, Jesus' sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd. They hear and they follow. And to them Jesus gives eternal life. He knows how wrong your life has been. He knows the angry words you spoke yesterday. He knows the lust in your heart, the greed in your eyes, the pride in your head. But He does not anywhere say, "My sheep are without fault...My sheep live lives that make Me proud of them." No, He knows how often you let Him down; how often you run away and live for yourself. But Jesus' sheep hear His voice--His words of comfort and pardon, and by these words you live.

Listen to His voice now. He forgives you. All of you He forgives. Even if you have never before in your life heard the voice of Jesus, listen to what He is saying...He is speaking to you. 'I died for you,' He says, 'I forgive you.' Baptism, and Holy Absolution, and eternal life are for you. Believe it. It's true. Let it not be said of the people gathered together in Augusta, "They resemble the people of

Nazareth.” But you, listen to the voice of the Shepherd. Listen and follow. Today, on the day of your confirmation, Caitlyn, and always. Amen.