

John 10:27-28

How do you picture heaven? As one great big, long church service? Hitting a golf ball from cloud to cloud? Perhaps as a garden, like the Garden of Eden? When the Bible speaks about heaven, it does not speak of what it is, but of what it isn't. Perhaps because there is no human language to describe it. How do you describe the beauty of a spectacular sunset to someone who was born without sight? Unless you see it, you really cannot grasp what it is. All we know about heaven is that there is no hunger or thirst there; no sin or death; no pain or tears. We know that it's wonderful, but we'll have to wait until we get there to see just how wonderful.

Our Epistle lesson for today shows us a scene in heaven. In a vision, John sees all the saints gathered together before the throne of God. They are singing to the Lamb because He battled for them against sin, death, and Satan—and He won. Jesus' victory is their victory, and they rejoice that they will forever be in heaven with each other and with their gracious God.

Now this picture is of heaven, not in the present, but in the future. Every saint is a part of that multitude in Revelation 7. Everyone who will be in heaven is included here in this wonderful scene. Are you there? Are you a part of that great company? Does the Apostle John see you in this wonderful vision of heaven? How would you answer the question? "I don't know?" "I hope so?" "Absolutely, yes?"

Jesus' words in John 10 will help you to answer our question affirmatively and positively, "Absolutely, yes!" "My sheep hear My voice," He says, "I know them and they follow Me; I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand."

If you are one of Jesus' sheep, then you are included in that great company in Revelation 7. You are one of those blessed saints in heaven, if you are one of Jesus' sheep. The question is, therefore: How does one become one of Jesus' sheep?

You are Jesus' sheep, not because of what you know, but because of what you hear. It's Jesus who does the "knowing." "I know My sheep," He says. You, as a sheep, don't need to "know," you need to hear. "My sheep hear My voice," says Jesus. There are millions who know about Jesus. They know He was born of a virgin. They know He died on a cross. They even know that He rose again. But knowing is not hearing. Even Satan knows these things. But he is not one of Jesus' sheep.

Do not endanger your eternal soul by spiritually relaxing in the fact that you know who Jesus is and what He did. That does not make you one of Jesus' sheep. "My sheep hear My voice," Jesus says. "Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ," says Romans 10. You and I cannot make ourselves sheep. Jesus makes you His sheep. How? Through the hearing of His voice.

That word, to "hear," in the Greek (akewousin) means "hearing with trust; with faith." We know that babies even in the womb are able to hear. For many months they hear their mother's voice while still in their mothers' womb. When the baby is born, he not only recognizes his mother's voice, he trusts it completely. He depends on that voice. That

voice means safety and security. That voice means milk to drink. It means warmth and love.

That is how Jesus' sheep hear the voice of their Good Shepherd. They hear with a trusting heart. They hear His voice, not for information on how to live, but for life itself. That life became yours in your baptism. From those waters the voice of your Good Shepherd called to you and brought you, in love, to Himself.

It may have been the hand of the pastor that poured the water on your head, but it was the hand of Christ that baptized you. It is that same hand of Christ that gives you His body and blood in His Sacrament. And it may be the mouth of your pastor who proclaims to you the word of absolution, but that forgiving word is really being spoken by the mouth of Christ to you.

You are sheep of your Good Shepherd, not because of what you know, but because of who you hear; because when your pastor preaches the Gospel, you hear not the words of a man, but the voice of your Shepherd. When your pastor absolves your sins you recognize your Shepherd's voice.

It is in His Word and Sacraments that you hear the voice of Christ. We cannot separate the voice from the Shepherd. For where His voice is, there Christ is also. And where Christ is, there is His voice calling out to us. A sheep will become lost and will perish apart from the voice of its shepherd. So will we, apart from Christ. That is why we stay near His voice. We follow His voice. We do not run from it, we come to where He calls out to us—in His Word and Sacraments.

If you have been neglecting and tuning out the voice of Christ; if you have been listening, not to your Good Shepherd, but to your own voice—your mind and heart—or listening to the world calling out to you, to follow after it, and not after your Good Shepherd...then repent. And we all need to repent; I need to as much as you.

Jesus' sheep hear and keep hearing His voice. And His voice tells you right here and now that you are forgiven. Your Good Shepherd died for you, and He lives for you. He is not upset with you for neglecting to hear His voice. He loves you. You are precious to Him. In love He calls to you today to draw you near to Him so that you follow, not the way that leads to death, but that you follow Him in the way of life.

Do not be afraid. Even though we sheep are weak and frail, your Good Shepherd is strong for you. Even though we keep wandering away, He keeps calling you back to Himself in love. No matter how sinful a sheep you and I are, you are completely forgiven by your Good Shepherd.

Are you one of Jesus' sheep? Trust the words of Jesus for you: "My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me." It's not about how well you hear, but that you hear the voice of Jesus. The power is not in your ears. It's in the Word of God. It's in the voice of your Good Shepherd. It's not in how well you follow, but that you follow Jesus. We're not the best followers, you and I, but we have a Good Shepherd who continues to lead us and call us to Himself with His forgiving voice.

Today in Augusta, Missouri, the Good Shepherd is here with us. His voice is here for you. His hand is here to feed you. And whether you know it or not, He is right now giving you eternal life. Because that's what He does. He gives life to His sheep as they hear His voice. And no one can take that life from you, because your Good Shepherd has already defeated all of your enemies. No one can snatch you from His hand, because His hands were pierced for you, and His hands are strong to save.

Jesus died for all. And though not all are His sheep, you are here today hearing His voice. You are here today where His hand, in mercy, feeds you His body and blood. Be comforted by this. Do not ever turn away from your Shepherd's voice, but keep coming to where His voice calls to you; to where His voice declares you to be His precious sheep.

There is nothing better for a lost and wandering sheep than to hear the voice of his shepherd calling out to him. Every day of our life, you and I are that sheep. All is well for you, my friend. Your Good Shepherd is here. He is here for you. Amen.