



“ONE OF THE FLOCK”
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John 10:1-10; Genesis 3:1-11a

As I said, you’re probably wondering what those two passages of scripture have to do with each other. I think they have an awful lot to do with each other, because it has a lot to do with who we are and where we are today. I studied, in my undergraduate degree, several fields. I got a very broad liberal arts degree. I mean, I’m one of the few people I know of who could cram a four year degree into five and a half years. Cram it in! I finished at McMurry College (It’s now McMurry University, which means that my diploma is worthless) with a Bachelor of Arts in History, with a minor in religion, and a minor in psychology, and I lacked one class of having a minor in Spanish. I lacked two classes of having a double major in psychology! But I thought, “I’ve had enough of this stuff, and I’ve still got another degree to go!” So I left, and went on and finished my Masters.

But while I was at McMurry and I was studying psychology, there was a thing that just intrigued me. My favorite discipline within psychology was abnormal psychology. (I don’t know, maybe it’s just me. I have that tendency.) I think that one of the things that intrigued me the most was the study of psychosis. That is, all the things that travel beyond just the neurotic symptoms that a lot of the people seem to have. These are the things that begin to really affect people. Most notably were voices. People who hear voices. I studied a lot about criminal behavior and things of that nature. John Hinckley was a popular subject in those years when I was studying this, and to hear the voices that he was hearing when he tried to assassinate Ronald Reagan.

And it has come to my attention that this one passage of scripture here in Genesis is all about that, but its not about the psychotic voices that people might hear who are mentally ill. These are about the voices that we all hear. Now, lest you think that I’m a little bit psychotic, let me explain.

I think that the most profound verse in all of scripture, the verse that has the most profound effect throughout the entirety of scripture, is that one question that God asked Adam and Eve: “Who told you that you were naked?” Literally, “Who told you that you were vulnerable?” Or even more literally, “Who else have you been listening to, besides me?” What other voices are out there that you are paying attention to?

I don’t think God was talking about psychoses. I think God was talking about all the other influences that are on our lives, that we have, that we’ve become inundated with. And I’ll tell you, in the 21st Century, it is even more profound than it ever has been before.

I was listening to the television this morning, and they were talking about who’s going to be the next pope. I was talking to a neighbor yesterday about that, and it intrigued me. And typical American fashion – leave it to us Americans to come up with this – it was like Vegas! I mean, they were already laying odds! There’s a German Cardinal that was at seven-to-one odds to become the next pope, and this morning, he was at three-to-one!

The press is the biggest voice that we hear, isn’t it? We hear from AP and UPI; we hear from Reuters, and CNN and Headline News; we hear from Fox News; we hear from ABC, CBS and NBC; We hear from NPR and PBS! And then if that’s not enough, there’s the San Antonio Express News, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the Washington Post. Do I need to go on? USA Today.? We hear things from all angles and from all sides, and they are coming at us fast and furious. And if those things aren’t enough, you know you’ve always got the Internet! Where you can get instant news, instantly! (Unless you have a slow dial-up connection!) The Voices are pounding us – what to believe...who to vote for, who not to vote for.

We've got three candidates that I know of, but I think there's about four or five total. But there are three viable candidates for Mayor and I just heard this past week the first negative ad. "Don't vote for this one." Didn't tell you who was sponsoring the ad, but don't vote for that one, whatever you do...

We get inundated, don't we? And if that's not bad enough, then we've got the marketing of the world – not just news, not just information – marketing! We've got people telling us what clothes to wear, what shoes to buy, what cars to drive, and it used to be what cigarettes to smoke, where to get your laundry done...how we are to live.

People! People! Don't tell me we don't hear voices! We do! And they're profound. And they're loud. But that's not just a 21st Century thing. People have been hearing voices for a long time. In scripture you can go all the way back. All the way back. Go back to Moses. I used to wonder what it was that made Moses, as he was climbing up chasing this wayward sheep, what it was that made him want to stop and look to the side, and see this bush that's on fire. I think I know what it was – it was God, turning his face with God's finger- "Pay attention, Moses.) And then you hear the voice – "Moses!"

Elijah – remember Elijah? He fought the prophets of Baal, slaughtered all of them. All because of the zealousness that he had for God, and they put a contract out on his head. There he goes running. And he heard voices! "Elijah, what are you doing here?" "Well, I was very zealous for you, O God, and I've slaughtered the prophets of Baal – four hundred and fifty of them or so, I lost count after about two hundred. And I was very zealous for you, and I've done all these things for you and been faithful to the core, and now they've got a contract out on my head, God. I didn't know what else to do." "Get up and eat and drink, or else you won't make the journey." Elijah goes and he hides in a cave and the earth shakes, the wind blows, and there's a massive storm. Then all of a sudden, there's this (whistling sound)... The sound of deafening silence, you know when your ears are straining so hard to hear anything. God came to him and said, "Elijah, what are you doing here?"

"Samuel, Samuel!" "Hear I am, for you called me!" "I didn't call you," Eli said, "Go back to bed!" Three times. Fourth time, "Samuel!" "Here I am, Lord."

Jesus. Mary. Joseph. "Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?" People have been hearing voices for a long time. And they've been hearing the right voices and the wrong voices. Wasn't it Pilate's wife who said, "Stay away from that man! You don't want anything to do with him!" "Ah! Leave me alone!"

And Jesus says, "I'm the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and I call them by name. And they follow me, and they'll follow me anywhere. Those who call and they don't know, they won't follow!"

Do you know how God knows your name? I'll show you how God knows your name! (Opening the Baptismal Font, dipping hand into water and pouring) Do you remember this? Because when this happened to you, God called you by name and claimed you as God's own! When you were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, God knew your name instantly, and called you by name because you had answered God's voice to come and be baptized. And if it happened when you were a child, when you were confirmed, you heard God's call upon your life and you accepted it.

Do you know how I know that? Because of these (holding up Membership Registries). Y'all don't know what these are, do you? Some of you might. These are the books of the Rolls of this Church. If you are a member of St. Andrew's, your name is in here. When you became a part of the Flock, when you answered the call of Jesus' voice.

We hear so many voices these days it is sickening. All of these voices. The voices telling us what to do, what to believe, where to go, and how to live, who to be friendly to, and who to avoid...

But there's one voice we need to hear, and one voice we need to heed. It's the one who knows us by name, in whose book we are written – the Shepherd who calls us. The one we follow. The one we follow. That's what makes us one of the flock.

I hate to say it folks, but, there's 648 names in those books. Look around you. Go on, look around you. My friends there is more wood in here than there are people (gesturing to the pews). And if you aren't one of those 648 names, don't worry about it, we're working on it! We're praying!

If there's someone you know who is in that book, who said yes, and who understood and recognized the shepherd's voice once upon a time, but who is not hear anymore, you wonder what voice they are listening to.

What voice are you listening to? Who are you listening to? Who are you hearing? The only reason that God calls us by name is to give us life. Not death, not destruction, not separation, not to persuade us to do one thing over another... To give us life – abundant and full. And that is what makes us one of the flock. That's what makes us one of the Flock – when we recognize his voice and he calls us by name.

I pray that when you are called by name - trust that Jesus doesn't do it just once, but he does it all your life – when he calls your name, you'll know how to answer, and you'll know which voice to follow.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.