

### Fourth Sunday of Easter

*“My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me.”*

John 10, 27-30

I'm sure that most of us, at some time or other, have wrestled with the question of how we hear the voice of God or of God's son, Jesus. In view of the fact that neither of them lives in the neighbourhood or travels the earth conducting rallies or seminars, we don't normally sit down and try to converse with them as we might with friends and family. Indeed, when we set aside time to pray, we don't get a response from them via little voices in our head. If we admitted to such, those around us would rightly be concerned about our emotional stability.



In light of the fact that God is in heaven or wherever it is that God dwells, and that Jesus no longer walks the earth, just how do they communicate with us. When we stop to ponder this question, we can come to only one conclusion: The only way God has of getting to us is through the people with whom we live and work and whose paths we cross and through the events that touch our lives - events outside of us and events within such as thoughts and feelings. After all, God is present in and reflected by all of creation.

So the opening sentence of today's gospel is a reminder to us that Christ, the Good Shepherd, invites us to listen for his voice, consciously and deliberately, in the depths of our hearts and in the moments of insight we experience; to listen for his voice in the exchanges we have with our friends and neighbours and in the pain and anguish of those who are doing it tough; to hear his voice in the pleas and protests of those who are exploited and turned away, in the cries of those who plead for justice and equity.

In real life, we will hear the voice of Jesus and meet God in the very ordinary and often unexpected places and happenings. There is a reminder to us of this in the story of Elijah's encounter with God as recorded in the First Book of Kings: "A strong hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God was not in the hurricane. After the hurricane there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire, but God was not in the fire. After the fire, there was the sound of a gentle breeze. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the mouth of the cave."

(1 Kings 19, 11-12)

In *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (HarperOne, 2009), Barbara Brown Taylor tells the story of an elderly woman for whom life had somehow lost all meaning:

She was old. She lived alone. She was afraid to go to sleep at night for fear that she would not wake up in the morning, so she lay in bed waiting for the sun to come up before she dared shut her eyes.

Then someone who loved her suggested that as long as she was awake, she might as well start listening for the first bird that sang each morning. Before long, the sound of that bird became the bell that woke her heart to life again.

She named the bird. She discovered that such birds like to eat and put feeders full of seed in her yard. Other birds came, and she learned their names as well. She began to collect birdhouses which she hung from the rafters of her porch until she became the mayor of an entire bird village.

The woman is still not a good sleeper. However, she has found a reason to get out of bed each morning. Just by heeding the words of a friend, she has rediscovered hope and love in her life.

Christ speaks to us all, not in loud commanding voices but ordinarily in the simplest and quietest of whispers. Of course, hearing his voice means that we are then invited to respond. And that normally involves breaking out of our own self-absorption and directing out attention and energy to those whose needs are greater. Christ is alive and well in every act of kindness, in every word of encouragement in every listening ear that we extend to others.