

Easter 4 A

I wonder what Jesus' voice sounded like.

We are so used to knowing him in things we read and in the talk of others that his own voice might be a thing we rarely consider.

But he had one and it arose as ours does, with a nuanced use of air and tongue and lips, thought and emotion emerging together,

a voice that deepened as he matured,

and changed with bouts of illness, fatigue, allergies, and renewed energy.

He spoke a language we would not understand and lived in a culture quite different.

His voice probably rose and fell in cadences different than those we are accustomed to.

Was he a bass or a tenor?

Did he speak softly most of the time or with a commanding volume?

I would love to know and would love to hear his voice; I hope that I will one day.

I want to be one of the sheep who hears the voice of the shepherd and follow him.

There are many jokes I will not make about the difficulty of hearing voices.

Husbands and wives joke about selective hearing;

children and parents sometimes seem not to hear each other.

It is in our nature to miss some of what is said to us and to miss a relational connection to the speaker in that moment.

One of the great problems of our culture is our hearing, mostly, of voices we already agree with and have heard before.

The echo chamber effect they call it.

Your friends on social media and your preferred internet news services and cable channels reinforce your sense that everyone agrees with you about those things.

And so many voices go unheard, at least on their own terms.

And yet our lives are full of voices we may listen to.

Many people want us to do many things; attend, watch, volunteer, visit, and, **buy**.

And so they call, call and voices fill the head of even the most well-adjusted among us.

I wonder, at the end of a busy week how any of us could hear the voice of Jesus.

Thieves and bandits we might call them.

Yet hear him we can, we have, we do, and the things we do to hear him are hardly unknown.

The voice of Jesus is heard in the Scriptures, that we read here each Sunday, that can be read every day of our lives.

Intentional, persistent study of the Scriptures is our most basic access to the Lord's voice, giving us a standard by which we can measure other voices that seem to be his.

By reading the Gospels, we know what Jesus said, what he cared about, and how he was in relationship with others.

We know what causes he lent his voice to.

By reading Paul's letters, we know what the first Christians made of all that, how they lived in light of the voice of Jesus that many of them had heard. And the Old Testament lets us hear the voices through which God spoke before God spoke with such clarity in the voice of Jesus Christ.

We also hear the voice of Jesus in prayer and in worship, for Jesus is not dead but risen and not sealed off in some other dimension from us but is connected to us by the Spirit. Consider Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, or Hammurabi; we can hear their voices in the texts they have left for us.

But they are dead; their voices are dead with them.

They do not speak from the grave, where their vocal cords have dissolved into the earth. But Jesus lives and from the realm of his exaltation speaks still by the Spirit to those who have ears to hear.

His voice may be faint or it may boom, and it may be drowned out by the chirping of mobile devices and the whoosh of the traffic of our lives or the voices of arrogance and insecurity that rage in some of our heads.

Yet certainly he still speaks, even if it like the tree that falls in the forest and no one hears; still his living voice echoes and seeks ears that will hear.

Some of us read this morning a poetic call to prayer, to the hearing of another voice, in a poem by Mary Oliver:

Praying

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

Of course, it is the combination of knowing Scripture and then dwelling in silence, in prayer, that allows us to hear the authentic voice of Jesus.

Pray without hearing his historical voice in the Gospels and you may end up hearing a slightly different version of your own voice, self-talk and self-justification dressed up in Sunday School garb.

We hear enough of our own voices; the capacity to hear Jesus' is what we need to develop, to resist the thieves and bandits that would fill our heads and lead us astray.

What Jesus promises to his sheep, to those who come to know his voice, is a kind of protection from eternal loss that nonetheless includes a clear call out into the world.

Hearing his voice, the sheep follow him where he leads,

Toward the hungry and hurting, away from luxury and self-gratification.

Toward reconciliation and the practice of mercy, away from anger and judgment.

When we hear his voice, we do his will, and we are folded into it,

One flock that has one shepherd.