

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE. MORNING SERVICE. 22 JANUARY 2012.

Sing before: Psalm 119:39+40

I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Grace and peace to you from Him who is and was and who shall come, and from the seven Sprits before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the reliable Witness, the first to have risen from the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth.

Amen.

Song of praise: Psalm 100:1+2.

Confession of faith: Nicene Creed.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the father before all ages; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and on the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. We believe one holy and catholic (universal) and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our sin and pray for the forgiving of our sins with Psalm 119:62+63.

Reading of the Law.

Psalm 119:62+63.

Prayer.

Psalm 23:1+2

Scripture reading: John 10:1-21 and Jeremiah 17:7-8.

Text: John 10:2-4.

“But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”

THEME: Do you still hear the voice of your Lord amongst all the noise?

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, you probably have heard someone say to you that the Lord spoke to him or her this morning or that the Holy Spirit told him or her what to do. We give these people a second look, because it sounds arrogant to us, as if the Lord speaks to them but not to us. But you could now ask: “Does the Lord speak to us as well?” And, how can I be certain that I hear the Lord’s voice amongst all the noise?

The Lord our God created each person and each animal unique. Someone who has been to a farm will know how every lamb or calf recognizes the bleat or the bellow of its mother amongst all the bleating and bellowing of the animals in the flock or herd. The Lord created us with the same ability. A little baby recognizes its mother’s voice amongst other voices. For example, when the family is together and a baby cries, any other mother or its grandmother could pick it up and try to soothe it, but it will not stop crying until its own mother has taken it. Her voice soothes it and it knows that now it is safe in the arms of the one who truly loves it.

Jesus employs an image that belonged to the world of that time to tell the people that He truly is the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the Shepherd of His flock and He was recognized as such, for the doorkeeper opened it for Him. In those days the shepherds wandered about seeking the best grazing and water for their sheep. At nightfall they brought their flocks to a common sheepfold. And in the morning each shepherd came to the fold to gather his sheep. In one fold there were therefore a number of different flocks of sheep. The doorkeeper knew the shepherd of each flock in the fold and he opened the door only to those he knew to gather their flocks and take them out.

Someone who did not have sheep in the fold would not be allowed in to take sheep out from it. Such a person would enter in another way, climbing over the wall, and carrying off sheep not belonging to him. Jesus is a true Shepherd for He was appointed by His Father to come and feed and care for and save His Father’s sheep.

We must note carefully how Jesus puts it. He calls His sheep by name and leads them out. It still happens today that a farmer, who really cares for his animals, gives them names. And when he calls out the name of a cow or a horse or pig or sheep, that animal approaches him. Jesus therefore knows by name each one of the people that belong to His Father. He calls them and leads them. Jesus therefore says that He speaks to his people.

But what does this mean for you and I living in the twenty first century in Bellville? How does the Lord call us and speak to us today, because He no longer is with us on earth so that we can see Him? Brothers, sisters and children, in this passage Jesus speaks of us too. In verse 16 He says that He also has **other sheep, which are not of this fold**. By “**this fold**” Jesus means the Jewish followers of

Jesus, the Jews who converted to Christianity. He says further on: **“them also I must bring, and they will hear my voice.”**

With these words Jesus explains that his gospel is not preached only to the Jews but that it is preached to every people, language and nation. And the people who belong to the Father will recognize Jesus’ voice and follow Him. Jesus thus calls us and speaks to us from the Bible. And what a wonderful privilege it is to be able to hear His voice and to be able to understand what He says for He speaks to us in our own mother-tongue.

You could now ask: “But how do I recognize the voice that speaks to us as the voice of our Good Shepherd?” It is the Holy Spirit that tunes our ears and makes them sensitive to hear Jesus’ voice when He calls us and speaks to us. The Holy Spirit fine tunes us to be able to discern the voice of our Lord amongst all the other voices and noises, just as a little baby recognizes its mother’s voice among many other voices.

This means that there is a very close and intimate bond between Jesus and the people belonging to the Father. In fact, He knew us even before we knew Him. And because He and the Father love you and me Jesus laid down His life for us. On the cross He paid for our sins. And after He had risen from the dead and ascended to Heaven, He gave us His Spirit. By the Holy Spirit the Father and the Son live in you and I because they want to live with us in an intimate relationship.

It is by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and by constantly listening to the Lord’s voice when He speaks to us from the Bible that we learn to know the Lord better. Thus, from our side too, an intimate relationship with the Lord grows. The Holy Spirit makes us willing and ready to want to know the Lord more and more. He, who lives so intimately with the Lord and gladly listens to His voice, is like the tree of which we read in Jeremiah. The tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river. Someone who is blessed to be a child of the Lord, gladly reads the Bible, studies the Bible fervently and seeks the preaching of the Word avidly. Such a person never has enough of the comforting and guiding voice of the Lord. Such one knows that the Lord will lead him or her on the right path.

Beloved, we therefore notice that when we live intimately with the Lord and are keen to drink in the Word of the Lord like living water, we cannot say anything else but that the Lord speaks to us. We need, therefore not be unhappy when other people tell us that the Lord spoke to them. It is normal for someone who lives close to the Lord because the Lord loves him or her, to say that the Lord spoke to him or her.

What should you and I do if we are not yet able to say this? Well, from the side of the Lord He has a very intimate relationship with us, of that you may be sure. For it is because Jesus and His Father dwell in us through the Holy Spirit, that we can believe in Jesus. But not all of us live as intimately with the Lord from our side. The Lord does not want us to be satisfied with that, hence we must not become placid about it. Let us, therefore, continually pray the Lord for His grace and for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us. So that all of us will avidly want to hear the Lord’s voice.

Beloved, we have the assurance that Jesus, our Good Shepherd, calls us and speaks to us from the Bible. But the voice of Jesus is not the only voice we hear. There are many voices that dearly want to entice the Lord’s sheep away from Him and to steal them. And it is not only those who have a weak

and shaky relationship who are seduced. It also happens that people whom we know as true believers, people of whom we know that they are serious in their relationship with the Lord, are overcome by the noise.

What is this noise we speak of? Well, there are many voices that make a noise. There is the shouting that, as soon as one hears it, convinces us that it is not a voice one wants to follow. That voice speaks of things that definitely are not in accord with that which the Lord tells us. It is a voice that tells us that it is not so bad to take a few drinks at a party, while you know that your parents would not approve. It is a voice that tells you that it is good to become terribly angry and to say bad words to someone who insults you. Beloved children, someone who is sensitive to the voice of the Lord will know immediately that this shouting is the voice of an enemy. The Lord does not shout at us.

When Elijah fled because queen Jezebel wished to kill him, the Lord spoke to him. It was not in a strong wind, or an earthquake or a fire that Elijah heard the Lord speak, no, it was in a whispering in a calm. The Lord spoke to Elijah in a whispering. Our Lord Jesus does not shout at His sheep. He calls each one by its name and He calls in a kind voice as one does who truly loves his people.

Sometimes it happens that one sees somebody for the first time and his appearance is fine. He is friendly and considerate. His appearance invites one to listen to him, for he looks like someone sent by the Lord. But when he opens his mouth and speaks the sound of his voice immediately puts you off. In Revelations 13 Jesus warns us about this. He tells us that the beast from the land, one of Satan's friends, who wants to destroy the believers, will look like a lamb but speak like a dragon. Therefore we must not allow ourselves to be duped by someone's appearance or nice words. Whatever someone says, we must always test it against that which the Lord tells us in His Word. If it does not comply with what the Spirit of the Lord Jesus teaches us, we must know that God's Spirit is not working in that person. Likewise you must test the words I speak to the Word of God. Being a minister does not mean that everything I say always is 100% correct.

The difficulty is not that a crook in some way enters the fold to steal a sheep. The difficulty is that the crook stands somewhere else and with technology and clever arguments in the press from out of the mouths of important people says things that sound good. It sounds Christian. And it is enticed by this Christian sound that some sheep themselves climb out of the fold. The sound of the voice of the Lord which they heard in their parental home or here in church no longer appeals to them.

Brothers, sisters and children, how many people do we not know of that have climbed out of the fold here, with us? And what have we done about it? About some that climbed out we perhaps feel glad. But it is a shame, a blot on us, if we felt like that about them. May the Holy Spirit convert us from such feeling and may the Lord forgive us that sin. There are some to whom we speak again, whom we let hear the voice of the Lord and we pray that the Holy Spirit may make them sensitive to the voice of our Good Shepherd. But the sorrow, beloved, is that many of the sheep that have left the fold of the Lord are young people. Let us continue to pray that the Lord may bring them back to Him. And if you are an elder or a deacon who knows of such a sheep, go and speak to him or her. Let them again hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.

There are many voices in the world. May the Holy Spirit tune our ears so that we may discern the calm voice of our Good Shepherd above the clamour of the world. And may the Holy Spirit keep us with our Good Shepherd so that we do not run after the lying talk of the world.

There are also voices that scoff at and disparage us as the church of the Lord. There are voices that ask how we can believe in a God who allows His own Son to die a cruel death on a cross for the sins of men. There are also voices that say abusively that what happened to Jesus was a great tragedy. To these voices we can only say: "Listen to what the Good Shepherd Himself says." He has the almight to lay down His life for his sheep and He has the almight to take up His life again. What happened to Jesus was not a tragedy but His offering for our lives because He wants to save us. And He did this on the instructions of His Father. God our Father, out of love for us, let His Son bear the punishment for sin, because He knows that we cannot bear it.

Then, beloved, there are also voices that want us to start doubting the goodness of our Shepherd. These voices say: "How can you follow Jesus if the path He leads you on is filled with so much pain and sorrow? How can you say that the Lord is good when He refuses to heal your dying child? How can the Lord be good when, in Japan, He takes away in a tsunami an entire village with 18 000 people?"

When we hear these questions of doubt and ourselves are overcome by doubt, it is the Holy Spirit that reminds us of what our Good Shepherd said. Following Him does not mean that we shall never know sorrow. It also does not mean that we shall always understand what the Lord does with us. But He always brings us back to the cross and says to us: "Here I died for you because I love you. I will never forget that because each time I look at my hands and feet I see the marks that speak of my love for you." That is why the cross of Christ is so important to us. There the Lord continually reminds us of His undying love for us.

Beloved, we close. We are not laggards when it comes to hearing the Lord's voice. We are also privileged to be able to hear the Lord's voice. Our Good Shepherd will not mislead us when He says that we must follow Him. The path on which He leads us is not always a peaceful and calm one but we have the certainty that He is with us all the time when our life is battered. We pray that the Holy Spirit shall keep our ears tuned in to the calm and peaceful voice of our Lord so that we do not run after the seductive voices and noise.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing song: Hymn 11-1:1+10+11

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.

Rev Coenraad Vrey
Reformed Church Bellville.
Sunday 22 January 2012.
Scripture: New King James