

Reading: John 10:11-18

Jesus said, "I know my own and my own know me and they listen to my voice."

One of the best-known logos of all time is His Masters Voice. A small dog, possibly a fox terrier, looking into the horn speaker of an old-fashioned gramophone. Many of us grew up with a gramophone or at least the records of one laying around in the attic or garage.



The story behind the logo is really interesting. The dog's name is Nipper. Nipper was called Nipper because he liked to nip at people's heels. He also liked to catch rats and chase pheasants. Nipper's first owner used to experiment, recording his voice on a pantograph, a recording cylinder. After Nipper's owner died, he went to live with the man's brother. Nipper's new owner, when listening to his brother's voice on the gramophone, was fascinated to see the little dog putting its head into the speaker to try and hear his dead master's voice. Nipper would sit for hours mystified by the sound of his master's voice. The original painting, which became the logo, was done by the brother who was a painter.

This recognition and intense listening are a picture of what Jesus means when he describes himself as the Good Shepherd whose sheep listen to his voice.

My experience of sheep farming makes no sense of this saying of Jesus. In New Zealand we push sheep along from behind with dogs. But the type of shepherding done in Palestine in Jesus' day was, and still is, very different. A recent visitor to the Holy Land recorded this scene in their dairy: Two shepherds stood some distance from the mouth of a cave and called their sheep. The two flocks had been sheltering in a cave for winter warmth. Each shepherd called each sheep by name. They had nicknames for each one. *Fluffybum*, one called, and *Fluffybum* would come out, Long Ears, Black Nose ... you get the idea ... until eventually each sheep had responded to the call of his own shepherd.

We love the image of the Good Shepherd. It comforts us. We find this image in stained glass windows, in the names of churches like the one in Tekapo ('The Church of the Good Shepherd') and songs like Psalm 23. But before we descend into the nostalgia of this image, we need to hear again the words of Jesus, because they contain a shock to the system.

Jesus is calling himself the Good Shepherd. Jesus is radically aligning himself with a group of people who were poor, outside the Jewish law, and generally mistrusted. To call himself the Good Shepherd was as provoking as when he named a Samaritan as good! Because shepherds looked after their sheep night and day, they smelt really bad. The flocks were small, nothing like what we would call an economic block. They couldn't keep all the rules especially around the Sabbath, so they weren't welcome in the synagogue, and especially not in the temple. They were often blamed for petty crime and accused of the equivalent of moving fences in their favour. They just weren't popular. Jesus is standing in solidarity with these downcasts of society.

The question for us today is are we like Nipper straining to hear his master's voice? Are we like those sheep in the cave eagerly listening for, and responding to, the voice of their own shepherd?

Jesus knows us each by name, he calls us. And his call is just as strong today as it ever was. But how does he call?

I can think of three ways Jesus calls us. You might think of other ways too.

Jesus calls us in the plight of other people. When we hear a tragic story or know of someone's suffering, Jesus, through the compassion of our hearts, is calling us. He is calling us to make a difference in our world, to care for and to serve others. (This is the goal of groups like Rotary.)

Jesus calls us in the beauty of nature. It might be an autumn tree, or a sunset or a radiant moon. In the beauty of the world around we see and hear God's call and it makes us want to care for our common home.

Jesus calls us in the delight of children. In a child's laughter or smile we find joy bubbling up within us. We want to thank God for the gift of children that call us to a simpler life, and we want to thank God for the wonder of human life.

The saints tell us that God is present in all things. There is nothing that we experience that can't be the voice of God calling us when we are truly listening to our Master's Voice.

Jesus is calling to us today to a greater depth of meaning and purpose in our lives. Are you listening?

*I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was, weary, worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad.
I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Behold I freely give
The living water; thirsty one, stoop down and drink, and live."*

*I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.
I heard the voice of Jesus say, "I am this dark world's Light;"
Look unto Me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found in Him my star, my sun;
and in that Light of life, I'll walk 'til traveling days are done.
'til traveling days are done.*