

Growing-up, I spent an extraordinary amount of time at my grandmother's house. My maternal family is extremely large; my mother had eleven siblings spanning many years. Once these siblings were married, all of the cousins included over fifty people! Grandma remembered each of their names, which made me feel very special.<sup>1</sup>

I remember one time when my cousin, and first bestie, Sara, and I were playing on the huge hill behind her home. We heard her calling our names and instantly came into her home. Waiting for us was a delicious beef pot roast complete with roasted potatoes.

She called us by name to come to her table. There is almost nothing so powerful in the world as when we are called and come to fulfill a purpose whether that is eating dinner or something more meaningful.

Looking at John's Gospel, it is important to put it in the larger context of Jesus' ministry. The purpose of the Easter season is about the new life Christ has created for us. What we recognize today is that the lessons Jesus taught before his resurrection told us exactly who we needed to be in order to follow his calling. We can see this in the way Jesus interacted with the leaders. Although the lectionary text ends at verse 30, the entirety of the story continues through verse 42. Here, Jesus is speaking in a forceful manner, to the leaders of the temple.

The reason that Jesus is present in the temple is that he is there for the Festival of the Lights. New Testament scholar Karoline Lewis notes that this festival had a continuous light burning for eight days marking the symbol as God who makes provision for God's people. The feast Jesus was celebrating, what is commonly known today as Hanukkah, the celebration of lights, happened after a time of hopelessness. When we are hopeless, we have trouble hearing God calling to us.

If, for example, we are wrapped up in the ways of Christ's calling, we will become overly focused on what is happening outside the world - the celebrity gossip, the next big party, the upcoming fashion show, a delicious dinner. Instead, Jesus calls us to a more basic image, to a time when we are capable of real change that only happens through Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Now, as Christ stands at this festival, he is noting that he is the new light of the world.<sup>3</sup> Disciples of Christ are called to continue that light.

In this scripture, Jesus uses symbolism. He talks of shepherds and sheep. We are reminded that our relationship with God takes work. In fact, Jesus uses the language of sheep and shepherds. This is a great illustration because being a shepherd is hard work, demanding endless care and attention and love.

At the same time, Jesus is acknowledging that if we cannot hear him it is because we are not being true to the relationship. As sheep of God's fold we must use these words of scripture to stay on the path of light.<sup>4</sup>

We recognize the identity of Christ and are made new in it when we begin to live a simpler life. Consumerism might feel less important as we listen to the words of Jesus, leading us deeper into God's creation, where there is warmth, sustenance, and no danger. This new life will require sacrifice. However, it will feel easy compared with the reward we feel living into Christ's creation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Especially because I am terrible with names.

<sup>2</sup> Wright, N.T. (2004). *John for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, K.M. (2014). *Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary: John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, K.M. (2014). *Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary: John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall, M.T. (2010) *Feasting on the Word*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press

Sometimes it is hard to see and feel the invitation into a relationship with God.

When we are afraid, it is hard to hear the call of God, the direction given to us in our lives. This is why for me, it is important to be open to God about our shortcomings and needs. Each worship service, and during Eucharistic visits, we ask for forgiveness and promise to forgive. This makes us open to the calling of God in our lives.<sup>6</sup>

The calling in our lives might come in many different forms. Sometimes, it is in a weekly Bible Study, where we meet and delve into different scripture. Another possibility is that we are hearing some of the false voices calling us - merchandising, consumerism, and the like are very much prevalent in Christianity. Occasionally, the messages might not align with the words of Christ. For example, we hear a voice telling us that Christ can be contrary to what we know of God's mercy, we should question that voice. We are called toward compassion. Another way to know if the voice we hear is in fact, Christ, is if it lifts us up and builds upon our strength.

While the Christian path is not easy, it is worthwhile. During our times of prayer, we are called to listen to the still small voice. That voice should affirm our place and existence as a child of God. The shepherd does not call us into shame,<sup>7</sup> but instead calls us by name.

Those in the temple were looking for a new leader. However, they could not have imagined that the new leader would be a shepherd. Remember, shepherds were field hands. Have you ever been around a field hand, someone who hangs out in a barn and smells like, well, we will say barn. The leader they were looking for was a king in all his glory, instead, what they received was a leader who was less showy.

In order to hear God calling us, we need to put away our expectations about who God is and understand that God calls us in unexpected ways. God favors the meek and calls us to humbly serve.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes discerning God's voice depends on our ages and stages of life. When we are a small child playing outside, it is easier to hear and see God working in the call of a beloved grandparent. It is more difficult when we are in high school and college with the ringing of phones that call us into socialization.

Listening is not much easier in middle age...and later with the demands of leading a family. At all points in our life, we must first, be open to the calling of God in our lives.<sup>9</sup>

We are called to be people who work outside of the box. When we hear who Jesus is: he is not someone who follows rules blindly, rather he looks to the purpose of the rule. Jesus heals on the sabbath, it does not mean that he thinks Sabbath taking is unimportant.<sup>10</sup>

We are called to follow Jesus by proclaiming who he is, the Lord and Savior. When people want to know who Jesus is, we are called with a story: he is the one who brings new life when all seems hopeless. He is the one who heals us in our hearts and lifts our souls. He

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<sup>6</sup> Tutu, Desmond. (2010) *Made for Goodness*. Harper Collins.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, E. (2022). Commentary on John 10:22-30.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-of-easter-3/commentary-on-john-1022-30-5>

<sup>8</sup> Wright, N.T. (2004). *John for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>9</sup> Tutu, Desmond. (2010) *Made for Goodness*. Harper Collins.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, E. (2022). Commentary on John 10:22-30.

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is the shepherd who calls us by name. May God give us ears to hear his voice, and faith to follow him wherever he calls us. Amen. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Wright, N.T. (2004). *John for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.