

**Easter 4C  
John 10:22-30  
April 25, 2010**

**Mary Poindexter was a brand-new mom, a brand-new Presbyterian minister, and she was looking for a brand-new church to serve. In the Presbyterian church, the way they assess the preaching skills of someone they are interviewing to hire, is to hear that person preach in a “neutral pulpit”. Mary Poindexter had to find some Presbyterian church that would let her come in and preach one Sunday, so that a search committee from a church could come and hear her.**

**So the brand-new Reverend Mary did just that. She located a willing congregation, and went with her family, including her husband, her sister and brand-new baby Ben to deliver a sermon to a church full of people who did not know her, some of whom would be listening hard to discern if she should come and be their pastor.**

**Her sister Kathy offered to hold Baby Ben and keep him occupied during the service. And everything was going pretty well. Ben was calm, happy, cooing, dozing, being just about as cute as a baby can be. Until his mom got up into the pulpit. At the first sound of her voice echoing out of the loudspeakers, Ben went nuts. Crying, wailing, shrieking. He heard Mom. He wanted Mom. And he didn't care who knew it.**

**The congregation was listening for the meaning in her words. Ben was listening for the sound of her voice.**

**“My sheep hear my voice,” Jesus tells his adversaries in this morning's gospel lesson. “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”**

**The sheep hear the voice of Jesus. They not only hear it, they recognize it. When Jesus speaks, it is as though we have been dreaming like babies through a long and boring church service, when suddenly, booming out of the loudspeakers, comes the voice of our mother. And everything mother offers, safety, love, nourishment, security, is embodied in that voice. And we crave all of that. The safety, the love, the nourishment, the security.**

**We know him. He knows us. He calls us to safety and we follow. Even in the darkness, even in the storm, when dangers threaten to snatch us out of his hand, suddenly we hear his voice. We hear the voice of Jesus, and we follow. We hear the voice of Jesus, and we know that everything will be all right.**

**Is that what it is like for you? Or for you? Or for you? Or for me? When life presses in upon us, when we are lost in tedium, when we are under attack, is that the voice we are listening for? The voice of Jesus? Among all the noises, all the cacophony of life, is that voice we most desire ... the voice of Jesus, coming to call us back to him, back to safety, back to pasture, back to life?**

**I wonder. Because in my experience, solid, middle-of-the road, mainline Christians like most of us, people with a good work ethic, like most of us, people with a lot of education, like most of us ... we have a problem hearing Jesus' voice.**

**So that when we are lost and wandering in the darkness, we neglect to turn to him in desperate prayer. It's easier to turn on the TV or the computer instead, looking for electronic companionship, Google guidance, the distraction of so-called reality programming.**

**Or when we are hung up by the incessant demands and insane schedules of life, we don't feel right calling out to Jesus to hurry up quick, and help us. It's more in our style to wave him off – *no, no, I'll figure it out, don't worry about me, God. You have more important things to do than bother with my little problems.***

**Or when we are under attack -- when co-workers, or ex-spouses, or angry siblings or rebellious children push us up against the wall, we don't stop and listen for his voice, right by our side, speaking words of encouragement, promising to defend us from threats of every kind. Instead, we fight alone, stand alone, cower in a corner ... alone.**

**And so we end up sneering at the simple faith of those who do claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Or we wonder how anyone can sing —completely WITHOUT irony -- the lines of the hymn we just sang: “he walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.”**

**We have been taught, very well I think, how to follow Jesus. How to fight the good fight with all our might, take up our crosses, love our neighbors, serve the poor, heal the sick, comfort the afflicted, and bear one another’s burdens. But I think we have not spent enough time learning how to have a relationship with Jesus. A relationship where we feel comforted, companioned, guarded, guided, and deeply, deeply loved.**

**It’s easy for us to talk *about* God. To pull apart Bible verses and try to understand them in their context. To read lots of books about God. To argue a lot about church and churchy things and churchy habits. To theologize and conceptualize, and analyze and try to figure out the great mystery of God in a way that makes sense and that we can live with. And there’s nothing wrong with that to a point – I am a great analyzer, theologizer and conceptualizer myself. It’s fun to think and talk and argue about God.**

**But if that is all we do, then we are like those adversaries in the Temple in today’s lesson. “Tell us!” they demand. Jesus says, “I have told you, but you’re not listening.” “Show us!” they demand. And Jesus says, “I do all these works, and you still don’t see.”**

**The only way to know who Jesus is not to be told. It’s not to be shown. The way to know who Jesus is, is to know *him*. The living Christ, who lives today, who died and rose and sent his Holy Spirit to draw us into relationship with him. Now. Today. You. Me. Everybody.**

**We are not supposed to think about him. We are supposed to know him, to relate to him in that intimate, “I-Thou” kind of relationship that Martin Buber wrote about.**

**“I and the Father are one,” Jesus says. They are so close, just like that. And we are called to that same, intimate, connected, dependent relationship. And in John’s gospel, Jesus describes himself, and God’s own being, in these terms of relationship, and friendship, and connectedness, and nourishment.**

**“I am the good shepherd,” he says, the one who leads and guards and calls and guides us silly sheep. “I am the bread of life,” he says, the one who feeds, and sustains us, nourishing us from a place way down in the churning acids of our very bowels. “I am the vine,” he says, and we are the branches, rooted and grafted into his very being, drawing all our life up through him into ourselves. “I no longer call you servants,” he says, “Now I call you friends.”**

**He calls us friends. We are his friends. He is our friend, our Dearest Friend, the friend who does not fail, the friend who does not falter, the friend who does not abandon us, even in our most desperate hours, our darkest nights, our driest deserts of tedium, or at any point in our dangerous, deadly mortal lives.**

**He is as close to us as our own blood, our own breath. He comes to us, makes his home inside us, asks us to eat him and to drink him, week after week, year after year, until he is much a part of each one of us as our own thoughts and dreams and desires.**

**After hearing author Sara Miles speak a few weeks ago, I have been reading her memoir, the story of her spiritual awakening, a book called “Take this Bread.” In it, she describes how she wandered into St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church one day, a leftist, lesbian, single mother who had been raised by fiercely atheist parents. She didn’t know why she was there. She didn’t know what she was doing. But she writes ...**

**“Someone was putting a piece of fresh, crumbly bread in my hands, and saying ‘the body of Christ,’ and handing me the goblet of sweet wine and saying ‘the blood of Christ’ and then something outrageous and terrifying happened. Jesus happened to me.”**

**“That impossible word *Jesus* lodged in me like a crumb,” she continues. “I had no idea what it meant, I didn’t know what to do with it. But it was realer than any thought of mine, or even any subjective emotion; it was as real as the actual taste of the bread and the wine.”**

**Jesus called Sara Miles. She recognized the sound of him, the taste of him, the overwhelming reality of him. She heard his voice. She followed. And her life was completely transformed. She joined the church, founded a hugely successful food pantry, became the director of ministry at St. Gregory’s and all not because she thought she should or because she wanted to be a good person or even because any of it made one lick of sense, because it didn’t.**

**Jesus met her there at that altar, in the bread and wine. She took him into her body, and her world exploded as she met this person, this Jesus, and discovered him to be her Shepherd, her Lord, and her dearest friend.**

**Come to the table. Find him once again. Take him into your hands, your mouth, your very being. Welcome him into your heart, into your life, into every joy, every sorrow and every irritation life throws your way.**

**Listen. He is still calling. Listen.**