

I. Gospel Background

A. As today's Gospel begins, Jesus is walking through the **Temple** on an earlier visit to Jerusalem.

1. John's Gospel records **THREE** visits of Jesus to Jerusalem during his ministry – unlike the other Gospels who tell only of the one final visit at his death and resurrection.

2. But here, Jesus is in Jerusalem to celebrate the **Feast of Dedication**, which commemorates the rededication of the temple in 164 BC by the Maccabees after it had been defiled when Antiochus Epiphanes made sacrifices to Zeus on the altar.

3. We know this feast by another name – Hanukah.

B. As Jesus was walking through the Temple grounds, a group of Jewish Leaders came up to him and said, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

1. “No more of these sayings about Good Shepherds, or Vines and Branches, or any more of these impossible parables – just tell us straight out, Are you the Messiah or not?”

2. Of course, they already had their minds made up – they weren't really asking.

3. They believed him to be nothing less than a heretic and a troublemaker.

4. Their hope was that he **WOULD** tell them plainly that he **WAS** the Messiah;

- and thus give them what they needed to prosecute him and rid themselves of this annoying threat to their power and authority.

C. But Jesus isn't going to walk into that trap.

1. He answers them, “I HAVE told you, and you do not believe. The **works** that I do in my Father’s name testify to me...”

2. In other words, Jesus is saying that his life and teachings have already provided all the evidence that anyone could ask for.

3. Everything that Jesus has done has been done in the name of God – yet they did not believe him.

4. Jesus goes on to say that the reason they are not able to believe him is because they are not his sheep.

5. “My sheep,” Jesus says, “hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”

6. So then, Jesus’ followers, His sheep, listen to his voice and give heed to his words and teachings.

- And Jesus recognizes them for his own and they follow him.

D. Once again, Jesus has plucked an example right from daily life and used it to describe the relationship between Him and those who believe in him.



1. The Shepherds of Jesus ’s day would come together in the evening and pool their various flocks for the night.

2. This would help protect the sheep and keep them warm, and allowed the Shepherds to share the night watches.

3. Remember what happens in Luke the night Jesus was born, *the Shepherds were in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night.*

4. That’s what Jesus is describing here, some Shepherds sleep while others patrol, banging their staffs and rattling things, so that the sheep are never unguarded and any predator or thief is aware of their constant vigilance.

5. Then, in the morning, it's time to separate the flocks.

6. Each Shepherd has their own distinct call and as they call their sheep – the sheep respond and disentangle themselves from the larger flock, moving out, following the Shepherd to green pastures.

7. The Shepherd knows his sheep and the sheep know their shepherd and will not follow anyone else.

8. Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”

II. Sarah Buell Hale – Jesus' Sheep

A. Last week, at the Thursday service, we heard about one such sheep of Jesus – [Sarah Buell Hale](#).



1. Sarah was born in New Hampshire in 1788.

2. Fortunately for her, her parents were advocates for equal education of both boys and girls, so she was homeschooled by her mother.

- When Sarah grew up she became a school teacher.

3. In 1813, she married David Hale, a promising lawyer who shared her intellectual interests.

4. But just nine years later, in 1822, David died, four days before the birth of their fifth child.

5. Sarah Buell Hale wore black for the rest of her life, as a sign of her perpetual mourning.

B. So now, as a widow with five children, Sarah turned to her considerable literary skills to support her family.

1. In 1823, a volume of poetry appeared, followed in 1827, by a successful novel, “Northwood: a Tale of New England,” which was the first American novel by a woman and one of the first dealing with slavery.

2. Following the success generated by “Northwood,” Sarah was invited to move to Boston to edit the popular “Ladies Magazine,” which she hoped would aid in educating women.

3. In the early 1800’s, churches began offering school classes to teach children the basics of reading and arithmetic on Sunday, the only day the children didn’t have to work – thus called “Sunday School.”

4. In 1830, Sarah published a book of verses for children, to help with this endeavor – it included the now-famous “Mary Had a Little Lamb.”

- In fact, one version of the backstory is that Sarah was the teacher whose student Mary brought her lamb to school.

5. Following the example of her parents, Sarah labored consistently for women’s education and helped to found Vassar College.

6. In 1837, she began working as the editor of “Godey’s Lady’s Book Magazine,” a role she would fill for the next forty years, retiring in 1877, when she was almost 90.

7. During this time, Sarah wrote many novels and poems, publishing nearly fifty volumes by the end of her life.

8. Throughout her time at “Godey’s” she worked to further the education of women and for causes which could unite the North and South across party lines.

C. One of her passions along this line was to work diligently to preserve George Washington’s plantation home, Mount Vernon, as a symbol of patriotism that both the Northern and Southern States could support.

1. She also worked to preserve Bunker Hill, raising \$30,000 for the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument.

2. But her most famous act was to work for the nationalization of the Thanksgiving holiday.

3. Her advocacy for the national holiday began in 1846 and lasted 17 years before it was successful.

4. In support of the proposed national holiday, she wrote presidents Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, Buchanan, and Lincoln.

5. Her initial letters failed to persuade, but the letter she wrote to President Lincoln convinced him to support legislation establishing a national holiday of Thanksgiving in 1863.

6. The new national holiday was considered a unifying day after the stress of the Civil War.

7. Sarah's efforts earned her the nickname "Mother of Thanksgiving".

8. Sarah would probably say that she wasn't anything special; she was just trying to do the things that needed doing, to see that women and children were educated, and to help to heal the strife caused by the Civil War.

9. Yet, her work inspired the Episcopal Church to honor her with a feast day on the liturgical calendar, and for the book "Holy Woman Holy Men" to state: *Her work, in both the women's and national spheres, was exemplary for its conciliatory nature, its concern for the unity of the nation, and for her desire to honor the work and influence of women in society.*

III. Being Jesus' Sheep

A. So how do WE hear and then follow the voice of Jesus OUR Good Shepherd?

1. Do we hear Jesus' voice and respond following in **his** way, or do we keep on going **our own** way?

2. Jesus is always there – patiently calling US each by name, but we seem to be so busy DOING that we don't even listen.

3. The difficulty that arises for us is that we let Jesus' voice be drowned out by all the competing voices of the world.

4. It is so easy for us to run after another call;
- or to become so busy and distracted that we can only hear the noises of the other sheep around us and forget to listen for the Shepherd at all.

5. We have work to do, homes to clean, gardens to tend, meals to cook, children to take to endless events and activities – we are so busy.

B. Yet, all we are asked to do is to stop and LISTEN.

1. That's it – that's the secret – we need to STOP and LISTEN – and then FOLLOW.

2. Like **Sarah Hale**, we need to LISTEN to Jesus and FOLLOW in the way he would have us go – giving of ourselves and our gifts in answer to His call.

3. Like **Sarah**, we too must RESPOND to help the sick, the friendless and the needy;
- and to WELCOME all those seeking to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.

4. The thing we need to do is to make the SPACE – take the TIME – give the ENERGY – to blot out the sounds of the world all around us for just a few minutes – and then concentrate on hearing the call of the Good Shepherd and then follow where He leads the way.

Conclusion

When we LISTEN for Jesus' voice and **respond** to it – then we ARE his sheep – and are truly being his followers.



And by doing this again, and again, and again, we will start to make a difference in the lives of those around us, and help them know there is another way.

And certainly THAT'S something worth listening for.

Let Us Pray

O God, whose Son Jesus is the Good Shepherd of your people; Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN. (BCP p. 225)

