

[Jesus said:] "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Christopher was a hard worker. He'd been working in the kitchen at a three-star restaurant for longer than he could remember. For years, he put in long hours, slaving over a hot stove. And at first, he loved what he did because he loved to cook. But now, the job had grown dull and monotonous. It didn't take long before the fun and excitement began to wear off.

To make matters worse, he didn't feel like what he did mattered. After all, he could be whipping up the most delicious dish anyone had ever tasted, and he'd never know it. You see, nobody gives their compliments to the chef anymore, nor did his boss ever say anything nice to him either. So, every day Christopher would leave work feeling worthless and discouraged. He felt trapped in a pointless, thankless, dead-end job.

"Why don't you quit?" his co-workers would say. "That'd really show 'em." But Christopher knew better. If it wasn't this job, it'd be another. Work anywhere long enough and chances are it'll become routine and boring. And it doesn't matter what you do for a living, it's rare to ever hear thank you. So, Christopher decided to stay put. After all, the grass isn't always greener on the other side.

But there was another reason Christopher didn't listen to the voice of his co-workers. It was because he had heard another voice, the voice of his Good Shepherd. Ever since his Baptism, the Lord had called Christopher by name. Christopher didn't listen to the voice of strangers, but as a member of God's flock, he followed wherever the Shepherd's voice was leading.

He heard his Shepherd's voice in Genesis (2:15) when the Lord God created man to take care of the garden, and so Christopher found that through his own toil he was carrying out God's design for himself as a human being. He also heard his Shepherd's voice say, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets," (Matthew 22:37-40). Loving and serving his neighbor through his vocation, Christopher had the satisfaction of doing holy work that was pleasing to God. And hearing his Shepherd say, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink . . . Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:34-35, 40), Christopher found it a joy to labor for the Lord by laboring for others. Because the Lord was his shepherd, Christopher did not want. Right where he was, he could rest easy in green pastures, and be at peace beside the still waters.

Then there was Michelle. She had been away at college now long enough to make several close friends. Her education always came first—she was at school to study, after all. But no doubt, Michelle also enjoyed her newfound social life.

Lately, there was a buzz on campus about this big party coming up. It sounded like everyone would be there. But all Michelle ever heard anyone talk about was how they couldn't wait to get "stupid drunk." While she knew there was nothing wrong letting loose and having some fun, she did wonder if this was the way to go about it. After all, losing control of yourself, your better judgment impaired, letting down your inhibitions only spelled T-R-O-U-B-L-E. Michelle was having second thoughts.

"But you'll be the only one not there," all her friends said. "C'mon, you're gonna miss a great time." Michelle wasn't so sure, however. Growing up, she'd watched as some boys from her high school who began to drink on weekends now

seemed to fritter away their lives by drinking all the time. And she observed her uncle self-medicate by “drowning his sorrows,” becoming a shell of the man she’d once looked up to as a little girl. Then, she’d witnessed the devastating effects hangovers had on her schoolmates after a night of heavy drinking. It seemed like whatever fun alcohol gives you comes with a steep price tag later on.

Michelle decided to sit this one out. Instead, she got some last-minute studying done before the big exam tomorrow. And doing her laundry now would give her more time for friends later. She even relieved her stress by going out for a run in the cool evening air. Surely, her friends—if they’re any friends at all—would still be her friends even if she missed this one party.

Well, good thing she didn’t go. Michelle got news that one student died of alcohol poisoning. Then, she caught wind of how another couple students—who weren’t in their right minds—got into a serious fight, one getting rushed to the hospital. About a month later, Michelle even learned that one of the girls got pregnant at the party. *Goodness, what would’ve happened if I went?* She wondered. And sure enough, her friends were still her friends.

That’s because Michelle was too busy listening to the voice of her Shepherd. She still remembered being called by name at her Confirmation. Being God’s lamb, she didn’t heed the voice of strangers, but only followed her Shepherd’s voice. She heard Him say through Solomon, “The righteous is a guide to his neighbor, But the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Proverbs 12:26). She heard Him say through Paul, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). She even heard Him say Himself, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25). The Lord was Michelle’s Shepherd, restoring her soul, and leading her in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.

Finally, there was Roger. He’d lived a long life, at least longer than he ever expected. The expression, “Live fast, die young,” could’ve been his personal motto. Yet, somehow he was still here. At least, for a little longer. You see, Roger had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Now, finding himself in palliative care, he was doing his best to savor his last days. But it wasn’t easy. His body hurt, he had pain all over. And he couldn’t remember the last time he’d gotten restful sleep. But that wasn’t the worst of it.

Because of his former lifestyle, he was racked with guilt. His conscience nagged at him as he waited at death’s door. *When I have to face God, what will become of me? He obsessed. I mean, I’ve done some bad things. Ba-a-a-ad things. How do I know I’m really forgiven?*

But then, his Shepherd’s voice would interrupt. You see, late in life Roger had come to hear the Gospel. And trusting in Jesus for his salvation, his Shepherd had called him by name, making Roger his own. Roger now refused to follow this unfamiliar voice, but fled from it since it was the voice of a stranger. He knew it was Satan pricking his conscience at this eleventh hour, the devil’s last ditch effort to make Roger lose faith.

Instead, he drowned it out with the voice of his Shepherd. “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1-3). “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). The Lord was Roger’s Shepherd—though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he feared no evil, for He was with him; His rod and His staff, they comforted him. Surely goodness and mercy would follow him all the days of his life, and he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

You and I hear a lot of voices too, don’t we? I mean, anywhere and everywhere, at all times, there they are. Friends, family, colleagues. Marketers, politicians, the media. You-name-it. Everyone telling you what to do and how to be. It can all be so confusing, can’t it?

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John 10:1-10; Psalm 23

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But if they're not the voice of your Shepherd, if you don't recognize those voices as His, they should sound strange to you. You should not follow them, but flee from them. The only voice you should ever follow is that of your Shepherd. At Baptism, He called you by name. You are a member of His flock. And He's pledged Himself to you to always be a *Good* Shepherd. You can trust Him to take you places, to provide for you, and to guard and defend you against all danger. So, confidently and joyfully, you can go follow Him.

And if you're ever tempted to follow after the voice of a stranger, just remember this—"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came," says Jesus, "that they may have life and have it abundantly."