

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace from God our Father
And the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me...

Quick story... Every spring sheep have to be weaned onto pasture slowly, so their stomachs can acclimate to the lush grasses. Otherwise there's a danger of bloat... And I learned that lesson the hard way! So, after that, I was always very careful...

On the first day I would let them out for 5 minutes, 10 minutes the next, and slowly increase the time. After sitting in a paddock all winter the sheep are absolutely giddy about getting on the pasture.

They rush out of the paddock like it's happiest day of their lives, nibbling here and there, looking for all the good stuff. They're almost in a frenzy...

Now, imagine trying to get them back in the paddock after only 5 minutes! You might think it's impossible! If you try to chase them in, forget it! Aint gonna happen! If you go out and say, "sheep, sheep, time to come back in," forget it! Aint gonna happen!

Every day I fed the sheep a little bit of corn. I would have it in a bucket and shake it. The sheep knew that sound and they would come to attention right now... They'd start baaing and jockeying with each other. I'd toss the corn into the bunk and they'd all go crazy. I did that every day.

So, after being out on that wonderful pasture for 5 minutes, I'd go out to the pasture with my little bucket, shake it good and loud, the sheep would start baaing and run directly up to me, I would walk into the corral, toss the corn into the bunk and while they were eating I'd slowly close the gate... It was my way of caring for and protecting them...

I don't know if my sheep ever knew my voice, but they certainly knew my rhythm and the sound of nourishment.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me...

Luther called the church a mouth house. It's where we hear the word of God. This is where we recognize God's voice... This is where we flock to hear stories of Jesus; to be fed and nourished.

It's here we come together, to love and serve, and support one another... It's here we speak the truth about who we are and whose we are. This is what the church is all about.

The church isn't a gathering of perfect people, the church is a gathering of saints and sinners. And all together we are the body of Christ. Young and old, republican and democrat, all different, and yet through Christ, all in the same family.

A couple weeks ago in confirmation we asked a question, "Why should we go to church?" I also asked the kids, "When one of your friends asks why you went through confirmation, what are you going to tell them?"

We spent a lot of time talking about being loving, kind and gracious people. Because in the life of faith, this is where the rubber hits the road. The Father creates, the Son redeems, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies. Sanctification is a life-long process of transformation engaged with the Holy Spirit, resulting in being a hopeful, loving, kind and gracious person.

Having spent much of my career in older adult ministry, I can attest to you, the Holy Spirit works miracles in and through people all the time. I love to go visiting, and I can tell you, we have some of the most loving, kind and gracious people you could ever meet anywhere in the world.

And it's no accident, these are people whose lives orbited in and through this church and community. They've lived meaningful, productive lives, they are grateful for one another and they love their families and community. Instead of being mean and cranky, they are loving and compassionate. It's really just that simple.

We come together, we hear God's voice, and we go out into the world to be a loving presence to others. Every Sunday we hear, Go in peace, serve the Lord...

We come here as a communion, a community in union, as imperfect people, yet called, reconciled and sent into the world, and not only for our sake, but for the sake of all the people out there.

So why do we go to church? Because this is where we recognize God's voice, this is where we learn to be loving, kind and gracious people. Then we are sent into the world to make a difference.

To bring hope to the hopeless, wholeness to those who are broken, healing to those who are sick, compassion to those who are lost, and meaning to those in despair.

And we are doing all these things. This is not hocus pocus, magical thinking religion, this is real, genuine and authentic living... This is abundant life. This is where the power of God resides to create miracles, in and through our lives.

So, **Noah / Carl**... This is what you're choosing to affirm today, to be a part of this wonderful family. It's been an honor and privilege to walk with you through this past year of learning and building relationship.

And as we've talked about, confirmation is not an ending, but a beginning. A choosing to participate in this wonderful family of God.

And through you, as you affirm your baptism, **we** will also be affirming our own baptisms. We are all connected in this family. We are happy for you and for ourselves. And you will always have a home here, no matter where life takes you...

The spiritual journey has many chapters, they are all connected, and this is where we gather, to hear God's word, to journey together in love and support, for the sake of the world... And to God be the Glory...

Amen...

Let us sing... *Borning Cry # 732*