

## **Are you listening for His voice?**

Harry was a recent retiree who had become concerned that, Edna, his loving wife of 40 years, was becoming deaf.

He recounted his fear to a friend down at the gym, describing how his wife just didn't seem to hear what he was saying to her.

The friend recommended that Harry test his wife's hearing by calling to her from various distances.

So Harry went home and found Edna hard at work in the garden.

As he stood at the back door, he called out: "Edna!"

No reply.

Then, standing on the edge of the patio, Harry called out again: "Edna!"

Still no answer.

Finally, he went up directly behind her as she knelt in her flower bed and called out again: "Edna!"

Edna stood up, dusted off her gloves, looked him square in the eye, and said, "For the **THIRD** time, Harry: **WHAT DO YOU WANT?!?**"

Just like Harry, we sometimes don't hear what is being said to us.

Not that we're physically hard of hearing like poor Harry, but because we're not listening. We're not tuned to the voice of the person we're supposed to be hearing.

In John's gospel, Jesus said "My sheep hear my voice; i know them, and they follow me."

And in Revelation, Paul wrote:

"For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them. "

It may be hard for us modern city people to understand exactly what those two sentences really mean.

Except at the petting zoo, I've never even seen a sheep up close. I certainly have never been out in the field with a shepherd and his flock.

The people of Jesus's time, however, were much closer to the soil, to the farm, to the fields where shepherds watched over their sheep.

Even so, they were not looking for a shepherd. To them, sheep were there to be shorn for their wool ... or slaughtered for food. Shepherds were men of little account ... field hands with limited responsibility.

What they were looking for was a lion ... a warrior king who would wipe out Judah's enemies. They weren't expecting the food animal ... but rather the strong, aggressive leader at the top of the food chain.

Lions are often used as symbols of power. Many royal crests portray the lion to symbolize the power of the king. The lion is strong. He doesn't get killed. He does the killing.

When there is trouble, people don't look for a lamb ... they look for a lion to protect them and to destroy their enemies.

Our human instinct is to look for worldly power – that is, the power of the lion – to protect us, but scripture says that only the lamb ... the lamb who becomes our shepherd ... can offer real power, the power of life over death!

With God, the Lamb defeats the lion who opens his jaws to devour us!

Those men and women in Antioch may even have been listening ... but they didn't hear the gentle voice of the shepherd because they were expecting to hear the roar of the lion!

If a stranger went out into the field and called out to the sheep, they would at most just raise their heads and stare at the intruder. They only obey their shepherd ... because they know him!

And the shepherd knows his sheep, too. If one becomes lost, he can find it even if it becomes mixed in with another flock. Calling out to the lost sheep, the sheep will recognize him and come running!

But the Jewish people of Jesus's time didn't want to be sheep ... animals waiting for death. They, too, wanted to be lions!

The message of the gospel just couldn't penetrate to those who were waiting for the Jewish messiah ... the warrior king.

As far as they were concerned, Jesus was not him!!!

Oh, some of them came to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the messiah, the anointed one of God ... but others became indignant, ordering Paul and Barnabas not to preach about Jesus.

In our reading from Acts, Luke said that most of the city gathered to hear the apostles preach the gospel ... but that the Jews – meaning the Jewish religious hierarchy – “were filled with jealousy” and violently and abusively contradicted what Paul said, and that they “incited the women of prominence ... and the leading men of the city” and “stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas.”

It really was a sad thing. The people were so hungry to hear the Word of God preached by those two apostles!

Yet the people of Antioch proved once again how fickle and volatile crowds can be. Just as the throng who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with cheers and palm branches became a mob and turned on Him just a short while later ... demanding His death, shouting “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

This time they were impressed with the gospel but still allowed themselves to be used against the very messengers who were bringing the good news to the Chosen People of God.

But that disavowal was truly good news to the gentiles – in other words – everyone who wasn't Jewish.

It didn't take the Jews' rejection for the gentiles to be offered salvation, but it gave them great cheer to know that God loved them, too! And that Jesus died not only for the Jews but for the whole world ... and for us!!!

As His followers ... as His sheep ... are we listening for His voice? Or are we like poor Harry, unable to hear the voice of the shepherd?

Are we tuned in to Jesus?

Or are we tuned out and unable to listen?

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