

***“You Know It When You Hear It”***

Rev. David Gregory

May 3, 2020

Easter 4



**First reading**

*John 10:1-5*

from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he’s up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won’t follow a stranger’s voice but will scatter because they aren’t used to the sound of it.

**Second reading**

*A Plague*

by Meister Eckhart

What a cruel act to be untruthful.

Earthquakes happen in the heart that hears sounds that are amiss.

Havoc is created in the mind that can no longer trust someone once loved,  
and schisms devour alliances that help support our life.

Words can enrich and be as wonderful spices mixed into the days we imbibe  
with all our senses.

There are fields in the soul—lush organic meadows, though sounds and words  
that fall there can be, at times, a poison.

A plague is spread by one who cannot tell the truth.

I don't know about you, but I often find myself struggling with noise. I am a fairly quiet person. It might be my personality, my Quaker lineage, or just a function of age, but I don't enjoy loud dance music, noisy restaurants, or big crowds of screaming people. At least not any more. Today, though, I want to talk to you about a different kind of noise. It's not the noise that you can measure in literal decibels. This is cultural noise, societal noise, the din of political punditry, or the constant rattle of differing opinion that flows toward us in swollen rivers of electronic information. If we're not careful we can get caught in its undertow, and struggle to breathe our way out of it.

Now, I am glad that we can easily find the things we need to know, and I firmly believe in a free press, as important to democracy as the rule of law or the separation of powers. But how much information is enough information? Which voices can be trusted, and how can I curate the facts in a way that won't leave me fearful, anxious, or depleted? The answer to these questions, I believe, can be found in the biblical archetype of the Shepherd. There is probably not a more beloved analogy of Divine love and compassion for the human soul in either the Hebrew or Christian scriptures.

The psalmist's words, "The Lord is my shepherd . . ." paints a picture of lush green pastures and quiet pools of water that not only provide everything we need for life, but also the beauty and serenity that draw us to a place deep within the arms of divine love. The Gospels tell us that a shepherd's love will cause him to leave ninety-nine sheep grazing on a hillside in order to find one that is lost, and to defend that lost sheep with his very life. Today's gospel reading tells of the instinctual, intuitive way in which sheep will follow their own shepherd because they simply know the sound of his voice. It is a sound that is recognizable, resonant, and coherent. There is something in the tone of it that is life-giving, that brings joy and hope. It speaks of safety and security, and of a happier healthier future. And it could not be any clearer, more truthful, or transparent.

It's kind of amazing to think that Meister Eckhart, the German mystic of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, might have something important to say about cable news outlets, the tabloids, or twitter feeds. "What a cruel act to be untruthful!" he says in the opening words to his poem. And his closing words are even stronger, "A plague is spread by the one who cannot tell the truth." Who thought that the information age would bring us lies so pervasive that they would cause us to doubt the very factuality of facts? Who imagined the coining of words like "truthiness," "alternate facts," or "fake news"—phrases that could be thrown into a room like live grenades, altering our perceptions, and calling us to deny things that we can see before our very eyes?

There was a poem we used to read as children that began, "Grandpa dropped his glasses once, into a pot of dye; and when he put them on again, he saw a purple sky." I think it's important that we go on record today and say that the sky isn't really purple. Facts are not fake. It is a skewed world view that invites us to deny what we know to be true. And it is more important than ever—it is urgent, it is essential—that we develop a muscle that could easily go dormant in an environment that no longer values honesty. That muscle is our intuition.

Intuition is an important way of knowing that has often been dismissed and disparaged. It is not a substitute for empirical evidence, but it is a complement to that evidence, and it comes from deep within the gut. Someone might mess with a piece of paper in front of your eyes, but they have no access to that deep wisdom inside the soul which has evolved over millennia of human experience.

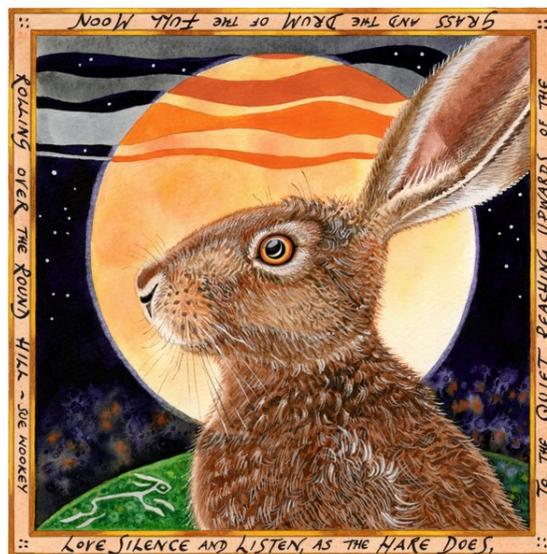
In a patriarchal system, intuition has been relegated to what is perceived to be the weaker, the feminine, discounted as emotionally centered and not really grounded in reality. But let's make no mistake about it; intuition is a human trait that has nothing to do with gender. It is a sign of strength, not weakness, and you ignore it at your own peril. You are far less likely to ignore it if you can quiet yourself long enough to listen. Henry David Thoreau, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Transcendentalist, said it this way:

*If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.*

There is an artful presence to this distant drummer, and stepping to its beat can sometimes bring us into discord with those around us who would prefer that we conform to their ideas of reality. But as Eckhart says, "Earthquakes happen in the heart that hears sounds that are amiss."

These are indeed interesting and trying times. We are inundated with a mix of sounds and voices, and it's easy to be overwhelmed in our quest for what is true. Thankfully, the human psyche has within it an ability to sense its way through the sea of noise. Intuition is a divine gift, possessed by everyone, but exercised only by some. So, my question for us today is this, "Where are the resonant, coherent voices that we can hear?" If they cannot be heard, it is because the ambient noise has drowned them out. In that case, we need to find our lush green pastures and our quiet pools of water and remain there until their unmistakable voices can be heard. There is a divine guidance system at work within us and around us. It is not a riddle. It is not hidden. It is easily found.

We have many words for the Divine. Some call it Wisdom; Some call it God, Holy Spirit, collective consciousness, the field of all possibility. Find the word or words that resonate with you and open yourself to the sound of its distant drum. You'll know it when you hear it.



*The Listening Hare*  
Sue Wookey