

When someone comes into the house—my cat listens very carefully. She evidently has an exceptionally good ear—because she can tell when it’s an unfamiliar voice, and when it’s not.

Clarissa, for example, has only been here twice for our Morning Prayer services, but Mocha knows her. She knows it’s a trusted voice.

On the other hand—she’ll listen very carefully when it’s someone she doesn’t know. When my daughter was visiting, she was torn. My daughter and I have similar timbres of voice, but certainly not identical.

It took Mocha about 36 hours to really trust Zoe enough to come up to her. That’s about 48 hours less time than it takes her to come up to someone with a completely different voice.

Cats can teach us a lot.

This is Good Shepherd Sunday. We will read in the collect of the day in a few minutes that Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and *“when we hear his voice we ...know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads.”*

Let’s all pray we’re a little bit like cats.

There are a lot of voices out there vying for our attention. Some of them are trying desperately to sound like the voice of Jesus.

And some are really good at mimicking the voice of Jesus.

That’s why we have to listen carefully.

We know that Jesus’ truth frees us. But sometimes, people mimicking Jesus try to use the “truth” not to open doors and set people free—but to close doors against some people. They firmly shut those doors against the kinds of people—they say—aren’t behaving in acceptable ways.

In reality, Jesus never let that deter him. He spoke to people who sinned, people who were exploited, people who were hurting, people who were criminals—and opened the door to all of them.

So-- that voice that sounds a bit like Jesus but isn’t – can’t be the voice of the good shepherd. Listen with the ears of a cat:

Bullies shut the door in people’s faces. Jesus opens the door for everyone.

Another thing to be on the alert for: Jesus doesn’t need to put his message on billboards, or shout all the time. Jesus recognizes the value in being quiet.

Only people who are unsure of their message feel the need to be in your face. Truth-telling is never belligerent—belligerence stems from fear.

But it might be a mistake to equate gentleness with passivity. It wasn't passive to heal on the Sabbath. It wasn't passive to tell stories about love and healing to those who preferred hatred and power.

A dead giveaway that someone is not the Good Shepherd is the person who—even while they try and mimic Jesus' voice—obviously believes they are better than others. They are like the Pharisee in the gospel of Luke who thanks God that he is not like other people. He's doing this whole serving God thing better than – those others!

The Good Shepherd loves all the sheep equally. Even those pesky sheep that get lost or run away when they are scared. They are all the Shepherds' sheep.

So take a less from my cat. Listen carefully. It may sound a bit like the Good Shepherd, and it may have the same hair color and even the same way of talking—but really listen.

I'm not sure exactly what my cat hears when she listens, but I can tell you she has never been wrong.

I'm glad that my cat thought Zoe sounded sort like me. I, in fact, sound a lot like my own mom. We are all related. In the same family.

But the person I most want to sound like?

The Good Shepherd.

I may not sound identical—but that's ok—there's only one Good Shepherd—and I'm not it. But I'll be satisfied if people think I sound a little bit like Jesus. That my voice has the same timbre. That I'm in Jesus' family.

So let's sharpen up our hearing. If we listen carefully we can tell the imitation from the reality. We will know the “I Can't believe it's not Jesus” from Jesus-- Shepherd of the sheep—who holds out invitation, love and truth to everyone. Amen.