Weakeness for Jesus as a shepherd who leads his flock.

- Father on 11.11.44, biggest day of shelling in WW2.
- Julia, Detroit Opera House, intermission Handel’s Messiah, sings “And he shall lead his flock like a shepherd to me”

Series exploring Sola Jesus as alternative to Sola Scriptura, slogan of Protestant Reformation. Sola Scriptura shifted locus of authority from church as arbiter of truth to Scripture alone. Improvement, but obscured fact that Scripture vests authority in Jesus alone

**Sola-Jesus text:** Jesus good shepherd who leads his flock in John 10.

Sola Jesus only makes sense if we have reasonable assurance we can hear the Shepherd’s voice.

As important as Scripture is—hugely important as the book Jesus regarded as Sacred, that bears witness to him—no replacement for hearing God’s voice. An **aid**, but not a substitute.

Last week we said Sola Scriptura came with a corollary, that Scripture is clear about everything we need to know. Sola Scriptura was attempt to gain-assert certainty in realm of truth.

**Effect of certainty:** override our God-given instinct to recoil at the prospect of **harming** others. Instinct affirmed over & over in Scripture: *do unto others, love neighbor as yourself, love does no harm to neighbor*. If our reading of Scripture leads to things that are harmful to people, we are supposed to re-think our reading.

Historically, Sola Scriptura, and the certainty it promises (a false promise) has been used to support exclusion of Gentiles, legitimacy of slavery, anti-Semitism, exclusion of women from leadership, prohibition of interracial marriage, banning divorced-remarried from communion, and discrimination against LGBT.

Fascinating that John 10 follows John 9, where local leaders expelled a man born blind but healed by Jesus from synagogue. No doubt, leaders claimed Scriptural
warrant for this action. John 10 is the response of Jesus to these false shepherds who mistreat people using religion to justify the mistreatment.

*Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers."

How were sheep cared for at this time? In small village, each family owned a few sheep. Sheep would be part of village flock, kept at night in a pen demarcated by a common courtyard surrounded by small homes, with a gate manned by a gatekeeper.

One of older children in village designated as shepherd for these sheep. He or she would come by in morning to lead sheep out to pasture and/or to nearby watering hole. A gatekeeper would let shepherd into courtyard and shepherd would and lead them out using a distinctive call (whistle or flute) recognized by the sheep.

Sometimes individual sheep were named by their shepherd, and the sheep recognized their names (a dogs do today.)

*Voice recognition* is crucial. Without it, sheep couldn’t follow a given shepherd out in open, would have to be corralled like cattle by men on horses and dogs keeping them all together in a group.

**Question is: are we really like sheep?**

Sheep are one of a **limited number of animal species** that have been successfully **domesticated**: bred to coexist with humans. In case of sheep, also dependent on humans for survival. (Pigs are domesticated and exist in wild, not sheep.)

What if humans *are* like sheep in this respect: we have also been bred, we have evolved/designed to live in God’s company.
In modern society, think of “hearing God’s voice” as a specialty trait that only a few wild-eyed mystics or dreamy-intuitives have. By contrast, traditional societies assume all humans are spiritual beings who can interact with divine-transcendent powers.

Sheep metaphor corrects for modern idea that disqualifies most of us from thinking we could hear God’s voice. Sheep not known for intellectual prowess (though more intelligent than stereotype)

Sheep can recognize shepherds voice, but they are not talking particle physics with the shepherd. Enough voice recognition to follow the shepherd to green pasture and still waters.

Bar of understanding isn’t high. It’s enough to get by. Not a source of pride (I am super-tuned in to God!) Voice recognition is not an accomplishment. It’s an aspect of our being. Ants don’t have it. Sheep do with shepherds and we do with God.

No accident: Sola Scriptura emerged with a modern worldview that relegated hearing God’s voice to a specialty trait (one that was held in suspicion.) Sola Scriptura felt safe, because anyone could learn to read. What if learning to recognize God’s voice comes as easily to humans as learning to read?

Over next year, wouldn’t it be fun if we had some 3-minute testimonies from a wide range of people who shared an experience of hearing God’s voice? To realize it’s not so strange.

We could all strain less and relax more: we are all the sort of people who can hear God’s voice. Maybe it’s happening more than we realize, we just need to recognize that it’s happening. Beginning with the thought: it’s possible for someone like me.

Helpful thing about voices. A voice conveys meaning with or without words. Taiwanese researchers recorded 200K crying sounds from 100 babies and identified four basic crying sounds: hunger crying, pain-discomfort crying, wet diaper crying, getting sleepy crying (92%) accurate. App: The Infant Cries Translator.
Went to Sigor Ros concert at Fox Theater in a pretty raw state after losing my wife. Icelandic group, immersive music. Thought lyrics Icelandic learned they were non-structured vocalizations. During concert doing some deep reflection on my life at a feeling level, processing my grief in a way I hadn’t before. Came out of it feeling closer to God, cleansed of something I couldn’t describe.

What if there are many different ways for God’s voice to register? Might register in our rational brain. Might register in our feeling brain or in our intuition/gut sense. Might register in a dream, on the wings of a song, or piece of art, or through visual media?

Scripture itself is a record of the many different ways that human beings hear God’s voice. To limit God’s revelation to the words of Scripture only—is to dishonor the witness of Scripture to the multiple ways God speaks.

Psalm 19: The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

God successfully communicated with people who had no access to written Scriptures for centuries. Even when Scripture was compiled, it wasn’t accessible to most people. Early Christian communities didn’t own a single bible. One community had gospel of Mark, another gospel of John, another a letter from Paul, or Peter, or James, and they went to synagogue to hear Torah read or Hebrew prophets. I met young men in Kashmir coming to faith in Jesus through what they learned of him in the Q’ran and through dreams and talking to people who knew Jesus.

Common critique of Sola Jesus: hearing God’s voice so subjective. Easy to get it wrong. But reading the Bible is also subjective and its not so difficult to get the Bible wrong.

Communication from any source is subject to misunderstanding. Doesn’t mean we despair of communicating!
We have ways reducing the error rate: we compare what we are sensing with what we already know. We compare notes with others we trust. We tentatively act on what we hear and we see how it works out, what fruit is born. All language acquisition is a process of experimentation, trial-error.

When we think of the sheep who recognize the Shepherds voice, where does the communication burden rest most heavily? On the shepherd, not the sheep! The shepherd has more on the ball than the sheep. Burden of communication is on the shepherd to communicate in a way the sheep can understand.

My daughter teaches first graders in the D.C public schools. Kids from many nationalities, most speaking English as a second language. Grace was a Division I athlete at American University (3rd team All American, he bragged.) Workouts were brutal—3-a-days in August heat. Weight-lifting every day, soaking in an ice bath for 30 minutes after each practice just to keep the body working.

She called me the other day and said: I’ve never been more exhausted doing something. This is taking all of my energy!

There is a greater burden on the teacher to teach than there is on the students to learn. There is a greater burden on the shepherd to communicate in a way that the sheep can understand than there is for the sheep to decode the mind of the shepherd!

Close with a little tutorial on one method of tuning into the voice of Jesus that uses Scripture and the imagination. With practice, get more out of Scripture and you will have moments of sensing the voice of Jesus more directly. LECTIO DIVINA (for hundreds of years in pre-modern era it was primary way people engaged Scripture.)

Read Ps 3 X notice which line or section piques your interest or your heart is drawn to. Then focus on one section and place yourself in scene: visualize it with your imagination, sights, sounds, smells, warmth of sun on skin.

Tanya Luhrman 30 minutes version of this and got one of the most profound messages from Jesus ever: Why don’t you write a letter to your congregation. If you are in a small group and want to try this, I will email file to group leader to try it.
The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

3 he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.