**January 28th 2024 Transfiguration Sunday**

**Text: John 7:14-17** 0700

**Theme: Recognizing His Voice.**

May the knowledge of our Lord and Savior’s Word fill you all abundantly through the powerful working of His Holy Spirit. Amen. Dear Christians: In this world there is great importance in recognition. To recognize something or someone means that we know of it, are aware of it, and are familiar with it. Something or someone foreign to us is not recognized and we will often avoid it because it is unknown. Yet it is often crucial that men have the ability of recognition in their daily life. For example, when driving a car it is of paramount importance that the driver recognize any possible dangers that may be posed by other drivers, by the weather, or by problems that may exist in his own car. Ignorance or purposeful neglect in recognizing any of these could result, and more often than not does result, in a car accident, injury to our bodies and possibly even death. From the time when one begins to drive a car they are taught that they must know the rules of driving, be aware of danger when driving and be familiar with their own car so that deadly accidents be avoided. Likewise recognition is important with nearly every activity we engage in, and in our social lives. If one plays sports they will quickly know the importance of recognizing what the opponent is attempting to do before they do it, and in war the same applies. Even in our infancy and early years recognition is important. A child will often be fearful if he sees no faces in the room that he recognizes, and will often cry until he is back with someone he is familiar with. Often we are uncomfortable in places or with people we do not know, especially places that seem dark, eerie, or dangerous. We all know these things and we spend every day, and exert great energy trying to maintain recognition. Men will often go out of their way to become familiar with something or someone so as to be able to recognize it. At our jobs we are often asked to do things that we have never done before and a wise employee will familiarize himself as much as possible with the task before he is to perform it. In fact from five years old we begin kindergarten and go to school through our early adulthood all with the purpose of making us familiar with history, math, Etc. So that when we begin our careers we are already somewhat familiar, or able to recognize, our work.

We all know these things, we practice them in our daily lives; we are uncomfortable, even frightened when we do not recognize someone or something, and yet we often think that it is far less important to have spiritual recognition. We spend day after day, month after month, year after year unable to properly recognize truth and error, the Word of God and the word of men, God’s work and Satan’s work. Often we think that we can get by because this is the church my parents went to, and we often say things like: “I believe what I believe because my parents believed it,” or “because my pastor taught me.” Neither of these are compatible with recognition in any way. Rather they are quite the opposite. It is often crucial to our spiritual well-being that we recognize the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ in whatever form in may come unto us, to know well when we are hearing His voice, and when we are not. It is not apparent on the surface, but many times must be studied, meditated on, and as we say in our liturgy, inwardly digested. Recognition of this sort will not come by neglect, passivity, or idleness, but rather, like any other familiar thing, through much time spent with it and in it. Today then we will learn of recognizing His voice. We will do so according to our text for today which is found in the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to John beginning at verse fourteen.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, Lord God almighty, Thou Savior of our souls, teach us we implore Thee to recognize Thee and Thy voice. Help us to hear, not just with our ears, but with our hearts and souls. Help us to inwardly know, through faith, when we are hearing Thee. Furthermore help us to spend much time with Thee in reading Thy Word, studying it, meditating on it, and in prayer unto Thee, so that Thou become unto us a familiar friend, familiar in both soul and mind, that we may be sure and confident when we hear and follow Thee alone. Help us also to recognize Thee in the mouth of Thy pastors and teachers, and also to recognize when they speak only of themselves. Teach us to separate falsity from truth, error from edification, and evil from good. Keep us from substituting one with the other, causing us to tread in sin upon Thy holy name, giving glory unto another. Overshadow us with Thy protecting hand from all the wiles of Satan, wherewith he attempts our overthrow. Be Thou our Refuge in storm, our Strength in the day of battle, our Shield in time of Temptation, and our Shepherd throughout this life, that recognizing Thee as our Shepherd, we may follow Thee all the days of our life and dwell in Thy house forever. Amen.

Dear beloved, let us listen attentively to the Word of our God, learning first that to recognize His voice we begin:

1. **By Hearing Him.** We read verses fourteen through sixteen of our text: **Read verses here.** Deafness and hearing are often used in Scripture to present the difference between the believers and unbelievers. Those who are deaf, obviously, cannot be familiar with the voice of their Savior, for they cannot hear Him. Those who can hear recognize His voice and believe in Him. We hear Jesus say: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” (John 10:27-28)* and in contrast Jesus told the Pharisees: *“He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.” (John 8:47)* Thus Jesus is showing that spiritual hearing equates to believing and being spiritually deaf equates to unbelief. Thus if a person believes He hears the words of Jesus and has eternal life, he even recognizes when Jesus speaks unto him. Yet there is a distinction made in Scripture which bears our attention. There is a great difference between hearing in the sense of believing in Jesus, and hearing in the sense that we can recognize at all times when Jesus is speaking to us and when someone is imitating the voice of Christ, but speaking foreign things. Jesus Himself is teaching this when He says in our text that the doctrine is not His, but the Father’s. He is saying you do not need to accept my word outright, but look and see if it agrees with what is taught in the inspired Old Testament Scriptures.

Some who were questioning Him in the temple here, would believe on Him because of the testimony of the Old Testament, but others not hearing Him as they should either lost faith or were barred from faith because of their ignorance of His voice. We hear later in this same chapter that they would not believe because: *“we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.” (John 7:27)* They were saying that they could not believe because the Old Testament never tells us from whence Christ would come, but in fact the Old Testament tells us the places of Christ’s nativity. He was to be born in Bethlehem, called out of Egypt, and dwell in Nazareth. They failed to recognize their Savior when He came, because they had not properly heard His voice. These all were Jews, children of Israel, the Church of the Old Testament, who when the fullness of time came for all the promises to be fulfilled, they failed to recognize Him and ceased to be the Church of God. They fell because of their ignorance, because they had heard other voices which were not Christ, telling them that Christ’s nativity is uncertain. They had been content to remain in their relative ignorance. Likely they were believers for a time, but remained in spiritual infancy which can lead to a fall. Listen to Peter’s words: *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” (1 Pet. 2:2)* Now it is good and right to be born again into the faith, and becomes Christians, desiring to be fed with the milk of the Word of God, the true Gospel of Jesus. However, just like a child who will not make the transition from only milk to solid food will have his growth stunted, so too, a Christian who remains a spiritual infant by refraining from the meat of the Word, is truly still a Christian, but is stunting his own growth, and endangering the health of his own soul, for Satan will attack on points of doctrine which are deep and meaty, He will call into question the simple Gospel, by pointing out hard to understand things. Thus Paul tells us: *“Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men.” (1 Cor. 14:20)* Grown men do not survive solely on milk, but on meat. Likewise to grow in faith means to partake of the teachings of Christ which go far beyond the Gospel of salvation, though connected with it and relying on it. Men do not entirely cease from drinking milk when they grow, but add meat to the milk. So should all Christians grow in their faith, their understanding of God’s Word, and hear Jesus’ voice and know when it is Him and when it is not, for they are intimately familiar with Him. Furthermore, we might recognize His voice:

1. **By following Him.** We read verses fourteen through seventeen of our text: **Read verses here.** Our text opens by narrating a few things to us which on the surface may seem unimportant to us, but are actually noteworthy. Our text takes place in the middle of the Jews’ feast of tabernacles, which was a festival dedicated to the remembrance of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness and dwelling in tents, until they were brought to the promised land. During this festival; they would dwell in tents or booths outside Jerusalem, and each day would offer the required sacrifices and worship God in the temple. It is a festival dedicated to what? Nothing else than the recognition of God and His work to bring us to the Promised Land. In addition look at what Jesus does, He goes to the temple, there to teach. This is not some unnecessary or non-essential narration. Rather it is showing us where and how God would have us recognize Him. That is in His house. Jesus makes Himself familiar to us in His house of worship. It is true that God is with us always, that we can worship Him whenever and wherever we may be, we can speak with Him whenever we want, but God established the visible church on earth for a reason. It is not unnecessary, neither is it optional, nor is it only a nice addition to the Scriptures. Rather it is where God is present with us in worship, it is where He makes Himself familiar to us, and the more time spent where He makes Himself known, the more recognizable He becomes. Being a follower of Christ does not mean taking Him wherever we go, but Him leading us where He would have us to go. He would have us assemble together in worship, He would have us go to Bible study, He would that we were in His house receiving the milk and meat of the Word as often as possible. Jesus said that the sheep HEAR His voice, but that they also follow Him. He made it a practice to go to the temple, and there to teach, we hear Jesus say: *“I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing.” (John 18:20)* Jesus taught much in the temple and in the synagogues because there one recognized that God’s Word would be heard, discussed, read, and studied.

In the church Jesus makes Himself familiar to us so that we may grow up in our faith, and receive from Him nourishment for our souls. Jesus leads us to His house there to worship and praise Him with like-minded believers, and the more this is done, the more we hear His voice in true and proper preaching, the more easily it is recognized, and the more easily imposters are recognized. One would never hope to become a world class chef by sitting on the couch, far away from a kitchen. And thus one cannot hope to grow in His faith, grow in his recognition of Jesus without being where Jesus teaches of Himself. We must follow Him to His house and there learn of Him. Furthermore we can recognize His voice:

1. **By comparing other teachers to Him.** We read verse seventeen of our text: **Read verses here.** Today we do not have the luxury of hearing first-hand the voice of our Savior. Today we hear the voice of Christ second-hand through His pastors and teachers. This means it is somewhat more difficult to know if it is His voice or just the voice of some fallible man. Here is where the familiarity of Jesus’ voice comes in. The more familiar we are with Him, the more easily we recognize His voice, and thus the easier it is to recognize any voices that are not His. When a pastor or teacher teaches anything which does not agree with the voice of Jesus we have come to know so well, we may assuredly ignore their teaching as that of an imposter. In speaking of men who recognize Him, and have grown in their faith, Jesus said: *“all that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.” (John 10:8)* Yet what if we were not intimately familiar with His voice, His doctrine, would we be able to recognize the thieves and robbers for what they are, or would we be tricked by them? It is of utmost importance that we have spiritual recognition, both of the truth, and of the movements of the opposition, for then we can easily recognize the voice of our Savior, hear it, understand it, follow it, and use it as a measure for the teaching of others. Peter tells us to make our calling and election sure. This is not teaching works righteousness, nor that we can, of our own power make salvation ours. Rather Peter is saying that once in the faith, men should continue to grow therein making His voice more recognizable to us, so that we be not led astray by imposters teaching devilish doctrines. Truly it is God which brings us to faith and makes us His sheep, but true Christians desire, as Peter said, the sincere milk of the Word that they may grow thereby, and then being weaned off of milk be made to eat strong meat and become men in the faith, thereby strengthening us by His power found in His Word and in His church. May God grant unto each of us a sincere hunger for the nourishment of His Word, and may He thereby continue our growth in faith and recognition of Him and His voice, that when we come to our end we may finally hear with our own ears His blessed voice, the voice we recognize so well, say unto us: *“well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”* And spend eternity in thankful praise and worship of His holy and victorious name: *“Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto Thy name: the upright shall dwell in Thy presence.” (Ps. 140:13)* Amen.