

WEEKLY SERMON

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Voice Recognition

Jean (not her real name) was in a coma in the intensive care unit when I went to visit her. I spent some time talking to her and praying for her. There was no response. I went back each week for a couple of weeks with no change. The following week, however, she was still in intensive care but out of the coma. As I walked towards her, I spoke a greeting and she just stared dumbfounded. "It's you!" she said. Rather bemused, I asked what she meant.

"Well," Jean replied, "the doctors told me that I have been in a coma for three weeks, and I have no memory of that time at all. The only thing I could remember was this voice speaking to me, but I thought it must have been a dream. Only now, when you greeted me, I recognised your voice at once. You came to visit me. It was your voice."

If you have ever listened to Dermot O'Leary on a Saturday morning on Radio 2 you may have heard the 'Mystery Voice Competition'. Contestants hear a short soundbite from somebody famous and must guess whose voice it is. It is surprisingly difficult. So many competitors start off with an absolute conviction that they have got it right, only to find they were completely wrong. We are not always as good as we think at recognising voices.

Jesus told his followers that he is like a good shepherd and "the sheep follow him because they know his voice". (You can find this in the Bible: The Gospel of John, Chapter 10, Verse 4). Many of us have more time to reflect and listen in this lockdown situation. I wonder if we would recognise Jesus' voice speaking to us.

There are so many voices clamouring for our attention: "buy this holiday", "get this app", "treat yourself – you deserve it". But the voice of Jesus is different. Often coming quietly like a niggler in our thoughts that will not quite go away.

His voice is calling us to have an "abundant life" (verse 10). He does not mean a life filled with things we do not need or want, but a life full of the things that really matter; like love and laughter and a freedom from fear or worry. That voice might seem like a dream, but it is the only one that is real.

Will you listen for his voice today?

Rev Ian Enticott
Area Dean of Accrington

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