

Lesson for Thursday, May 5 & Sunday, May 8, 2022

GOSPEL: John 10: 22-30

“Discerning the Shepherd’s Voice”



Context

“And into this setting again comes the identity question: “Hey, Jesus, stop keeping us in the dark. If you’re the Messiah, just tell us straight out” (verse 24). My belief is that Jesus is getting pretty tired of these questions. This need to question Jesus’ identity is sometimes called the messianic secret of John. John has used the term *messias* two times to explain to non-Jews who Jesus is. It is the equivalent term to *christos*, or the anointed one. But the questioners still don’t get it.

Jesus has given the people around him numerous examples of his identity (verse 25). He has performed miracles and has become the Word made flesh. He has had others question his identity repeatedly. This was normal at the time. Folks who taught or prophesied were often asked to give proof of their deeds and the power behind their gift. But the questions in this passage go beyond that. They are questioning not only his identity but if his power is verifiably from God (verse 25). And as I hear that doubt creep into their questions, I am reminded that doubt is a constant companion to faith.” (Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-of-easter-3/commentary-on-john-1022-30 by Karyn Wiseman)

Insight

“Here’s the thing: the generation of Christians coming of age isn’t particularly interested in the pre-packaged answers theologians of the past offer them. They are seeking an actual relationship with God, they want a genuine encounter with the divine, they hope for an experience of grace. So perhaps this week we can invite folks to name their questions about faith,

their curiosity about God, their wonderment over various dimensions of their life in this world, and instead of using the theology we learned in seminary to provide answers simply remind our people that when they ask these questions they are actually doing theology and are in very good company. Theology, in other words, is no more or less than the activity of seeking to know, experience, and understand God rather than passively receiving the wisdom of another era, and it’s our job to invite our people to be theologians.

All of which makes me think that perhaps after wrestling with my questions about the nature of faith, I can then set them aside for a moment and live with the tension they create in order to hear the words of promise Jesus offers, the promise that is at the heart of this passage and, indeed, the whole Gospel: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. *No one will snatch them out of my hand.* What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand.”” (Excerpts from davidlose.net/2016/04/easter-4-c-the-electing-word/)

Gospel Reading

“They were celebrating Hanukkah just then in Jerusalem. It was winter. Jesus was strolling in the Temple across Solomon’s Porch. The Jews, circling him, said, “How long are you going to keep us guessing? If you’re the Messiah, tell us straight out.” Jesus answered, “I told you, but you don’t believe. Everything I have done has been authorized by my Father, actions that speak louder than words. You don’t believe because you’re not my sheep. My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them real and eternal life. They are protected from the Destroyer for good. No one can steal them from out of my hand. The Father who put them under my care is so much greater than the Destroyer and Thief. No one could ever get them away from him. I and the Father are one heart and mind.” The Message

What It Could Mean?

“There is a tension between God’s initiative and human responsibility that is not resolved in John’s Gospel (or perhaps in the entire Bible!). It is only with the eyes of faith that one can see the truth concerning Jesus. Those who belong to Jesus, who hear and recognize his voice and follow him, have been given to him by the Father (10:29). Everything depends on God’s initiative. God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him (3:16-17). At the same time, the result of Jesus’ coming into the world is that those who do not believe are subject to judgment.

The preacher cannot resolve this tension. Neither can the preacher argue people into faith with convincing words. (Even Jesus could not do that!) But the preacher can declare the promise that creates and sustains faith—the promise of the Good Shepherd to give us eternal life, the promise that no one will be able to snatch us out of his hand (10:28).

The preacher can also help hearers discern the Shepherd’s voice amidst all the other voices that clamor for our attention, many of whom claim to speak for God. Those voices are legion, but we do not always recognize how contrary they are to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

By contrast, the Good Shepherd tells us that everything depends on belonging to him. Never does our status before God depend on how we feel, on having the right experience, on being free of doubt, or on what we accomplish. It depends on one thing only: that we are known by the shepherd: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish” (John 10:28).

The voice of the Good Shepherd is a voice that liberates rather than oppresses. It does not say, “Do this, and then maybe you will be good enough to be one of my sheep.” It says, “You belong to me already. No one can snatch you out of my hand.” Secure in this belonging, we are free to live the abundant life of

which Jesus spoke earlier in the chapter: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

The abundant life of which Jesus speaks is not necessarily about abundance in years, or in wealth, or status, or accomplishments. It is life that is abundant in the love of God made known in Jesus Christ, love that overflows to others (John 13:34-35). It is eternal life because its source is in God who is eternal (17:3), and in Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life (11:25-26).

Amidst all the other voices that evoke fear, make demands, or give advice, the voice of the good shepherd is a voice of promise—a voice that calls us by name and claims us as God’s own.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org, Revised Common Lectionary, by Elisabeth Johnson*)

Readings for Further Study

- **Psalm 95:7 & John 10:11/9** “We are the flock under his care/Jesus is both Good Shepherd and Door of the sheepfold”
- **1 Peter 2:2 & Hebrews 5: 12-14** Shepherds of God’s people are to provide their flock with the pure milk of the Word of God so they can move on to the meat and solid food to be spiritually mature

Thought for the Day

“It takes some of us a lifetime to learn that Christ, our Good Shepherd, knows exactly what He is doing with us. He understands us perfectly.” ~ W. Phillip Keller

A Prayer

“Good shepherd, thank you for calling, caring, and extending eternal life. Open our spirits and hearts, so we might hear you.”

Amen. ~ *Daily Discipleship, “Prayers of Discipleship,” ELCA*