

Plain and Simple
John 10:22-30
Preached May 11, 2025

Have you ever tried to teach someone a skill that has become second nature to you? I have been trying to teach Greg some basic cooking skills. And I am always working at bringing my knowledge to a beginners level, even those things I think don't need to be clarified. Or have you ever asked a computer geek to teach you how to use a program, or do something you are unfamiliar with? Yeah, it's also not easy to be on the receiving end of the learning curve. It can be a frustrating experience from both sides.

And that is where we find ourselves in today's reading from the Gospel of John. "How long will you keep us in suspense?" the people of Jerusalem were asking. "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly!" Does that request seem familiar to you? The people of Jerusalem wanted a "tell us plainly, and keep it simple!" kind of faith. And frankly, so do we all! I know I do. Don't you?

There are many people in the world today, who would find it so much easier to come to grips with the reality of God if God would just rip open the bright blue sky one day, stick his head through the clouds for all to see and say, "Hey! It's ME! I really DO exist!" We all want a "tell us plainly!" kind of faith.

It's human nature to want things plain and simple, straightforward and uncomplicated. So it shouldn't surprise us that one winter, when Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication, a lot of people who were curious about him and the faith he was teaching gathered around him and said, "Don't keep us in suspense! If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly!" What an opportunity for Jesus to lead these folks into a living faith, to explain to them the truth about himself as God's chosen one. Tell them plainly! Just tell them plainly if you are the Messiah, and they will believe!

But did you hear Jesus' answer? It may not be plain at first glance, but Jesus' answer to the people's demand to "yell us plainly!" is "No." "No! I'm not going to tell you plainly." Strange, don't you think? I mean, if Jesus were to come into our worship service right now, walk down the aisle, stood right here in the pulpit wouldn't you jump at the chance to ask him some questions? I know I would. And what would you think if, after putting all our questions out there, Jesus paused – scratched his beard a little – and then said, "no"? "No. I'm not going to tell you plainly."

But Jesus didn't cut off those who came to him. Rather Jesus gives them an answer that is both insightful and frustrating. He stated, simply and plainly "I did tell you, but you didn't believe. You've seen my miracles, and you still don't believe. And here's why you don't believe -- you don't believe because you are not my sheep."

Now, Jesus was not saying that these people were spiritual rejects. In fact, they were people of the covenant, steeped in the knowledge of God. But they couldn't seem to connect the dots between the word of God they had been taught and in John's terms "the word made flesh." Which is very surprising because in the Hebraic mind, to believe is to be aware of a word or action (especially

God's word and actions), to acknowledge its authority, and act accordingly. And if anything, Jesus' words and actions were very consistent with who God is, so much so that he could say 'I and the father are one.'

So, it is those who hear his words and see his works, who recognize them as true and genuine, who then believe him and live out of that certainty; these are the one Jesus says, are his sheep, who belong ultimately to God.

To put it simply Jesus seems to be implying that those who could not 'see the plain truth' had chosen a way that simply does not work. You see, they wanted to be told what to believe, and what to do, but they had missed the essential nature of the covenant. It is not just about correct knowledge, and not just about good actions. It is all about relationship – as God said to Israel at Sinai, "I shall be your God and you shall be my people." (Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:11-12, Jeremiah 7:22a, 23) or as Jesus said 'My sheep hear my voice - and I know them. They follow me - and I give them eternal life.' (John 10:27,28)

The Judeans may have been struggling with something we all tend to fall into - we seek information but stop short of knowing the informer, we are skilled at doing a task, even a good work, and seldom connect with the one we seek to serve. But really the priority of faith is not knowledge or behavior, as good as they are. Rather it is to know and be known. That was the promise of the prophets, That is, in fact, the whole of eternal life – abundant life as Jesus himself prayed "that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent". (John 17:3) or as Paul said, "that I may know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and become like him, even in his death." (Philippians 3:10)

It is the gift of pure relationship that has been God's intent from the creation of humanity – that we may be one with him. That is why Jesus uses the imagery of sheep and shepherd, because you can't have one without the other. As Jesus said earlier in this chapter, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me. (John 10:14) I call by sheep by name, and they follow me." (John 10:4-5) That is nothing, if not deeply personal and relational. And that is the essence of Jesus' ministry, to call people into relationship with him and with God.

From the very beginning of the story, when Jesus was calling his first disciples, he said, "Follow me." At the end of the story, after the resurrection, having breakfast on the beach he said: "Follow me." Throughout the gospel, the message is always the same – Jesus calls, and those who hear him follow. When we hear him and follow him, the claim to be his own is made real. We belong, we belong to Jesus and we belong to God.

And that, my friends, is good news indeed. Plain and simple. Amen.

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