

Sermon 8 May 2022

John 10:22-30

I see two issues being raised by Jesus in this short Gospel passage – the issues of faith and of his call to us. Both of these issues we have talked about in recent weeks. But first, let us look at the context in which Jesus is speaking.

Jesus is in Jerusalem at the time of the Festival of Dedication, also known as Hanukkah. It commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem during the second century, when according to legend Jews had risen up against their Greek-Syrian oppressors in what was known as the Maccabean Revolt. Against all odds, a small band of faithful but poorly armed Jews, led by Judah the Maccabee, defeated one of the mightiest armies on earth, drove the Greeks from the land and reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

So Jesus is walking through the Temple and the Jewish leaders put the question to him, 'Please tell us, straight up, are you the Messiah?' Jesus replies that he has already told them and has also shown them through what he has done in the name of his father, but they still fail to understand; they still refuse to believe. So here we have the first issue – that of faith.

Faith is a wonderful thing. Knowledge is a wonderful thing but it is very different to faith. We explored this in some detail last week so I won't go into too much detail on that, but I do remind you that I did say that I could point to certain factors which would indicate some justification for our faith. If you remember, I mentioned the writers of the Bible, our history, prayer, architecture, music etc. In this case Jesus points to those things he has done in the name of God. He is referring to his miracles, his teaching. But still the Jewish leaders don't believe him. They need more tangible proof. I don't altogether blame them. Asking them to come to terms with the fact that the Messiah, a figure featuring prominently in their history, is now in their midst, is a big call.

And remember, the Resurrection has yet to happen at this stage. It is so much easier for us having had the chance to learn about, not only the life of Jesus here on earth, but also what happened after he died on the cross; to believe. And yet, even then, those that believe are today probably in the minority. Faith is not an easy thing, but then I ask myself, is it faith itself that is difficult, or is it actually putting it into practice? Because I believe that deep down the vast majority of people do believe; it's just that they are not too sure what they believe in.

I am reminded of the well-known story of Blondin, the famous French tightrope walker. In 1894 Blondin strung a tightrope across the Niagra falls and, before thousands of cheering people, inched his way from the Canadian side to the United States side of the falls. When he arrived safely, the crowd cheered him. They yelled his name over and over again, 'Blondin! Blondin!' Blondin shouted back at the crowd, 'I am Blondin! Do you believe in me?'

The crowd shouted back, 'We believe! We believe!' Blondin then asked them, 'Do you believe that I can go back across the falls on that tightrope carrying someone on my shoulders?' The crowd shouted back, 'We believe! We believe!' Blondin then asked, 'Who will that person be?'

There was dead silence. Then after an uncomfortable few minutes, a man stepped forward. He climbed on Blondin's shoulders and Blondin carried him, albeit a little precariously, back to the other side of the falls.

Are we like the crowd or are we like that one man? Saying we believe is one thing, actually putting it into practice is another. That's a question I will leave you to ponder.

The second issue Jesus raises is his call to us. '*My sheep recognise my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*' Verse 27. A couple of points to take on board here. First, this exchange takes place very soon after Jesus gives us the parable of the Good Shepherd. So this image of us as his flock and Jesus caring for us is fresh in the minds of his listeners.

Jesus goes on to say that those who recognise his voice and follow him will be taken care of by him. '*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from me.*' In other words, if we follow him, if we believe in him, he will care for us as a shepherd cares for his sheep. You might say, our future is in safe hands.

However, I do believe there is a bit more to it than just an assurance of a safe future. There is also an element of his call to us and us answering that call. Hence the reference to recognising his voice and following him. Interestingly, this particular Sunday is often referred to as Vocation Sunday or Good Shepherd Sunday. What is a vocation?

A vocation is an occupation to which a person feels called to and for which they feel suitable. What is also interesting is that the term has its origins in Christianity. The word *vocation* comes from the Latin *vocation*, which literally refers to God's calling.

So before you get a little confused with all these connections and references, let's join the dots together; let's sum up. Using the analogy of a shepherd, Jesus calls us to follow him, and if we answer his call, he promises that he will care for and protect us; he will always be there for us. The point is, that promise is predicated on us believing in him and being, as faithfully as we can, committed disciples of his.

Let me finish by repeating something we have explored over the past couple of weeks – in the end, we practise our faith through what we do for others. If and when we do that, Christ promises that he will always be there for us.

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