

Sermon 11 May 2025 God's call to us

Philippians 4:6-7 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 and they very much go hand in hand. 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 BC, 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 the Maccabees, 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 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 two weeks ago 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, art, 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 (shades of Thomas). 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 in the flesh, is a big call.

And remember, the Resurrection has yet to happen. 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 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 living it out in reality, in our day to day lives. Because I do believe that deep down the majority of people do believe; it's just that they are not too sure what they believe in and how that relates to their everyday lives.

I am sure you have heard the well-known story of Blondin, the famous French tightrope walker. In 1894 Blondin strung a tightrope across the Niagara 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, 'I am Blondin. Do you believe in me?' The crowd shouted back, 'We believe! We believe!' Blondin then asked them, 'Do you believe 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.

My question is this, Are we like the crowd, proclaiming our belief but reluctant to actually put that belief into action, or are we like that one man whose actions actually spoke louder than his words? Saying we believe is one thing, but for our lives to genuinely reflect that belief is another. It's not just about believing, it's really about embodying and implementing that faith in our day to day lives. I quote from our first reading from Philippians: *'Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me – everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.'* Philippians 4:9.

Richard Foster, theologian and author, offers this perspective: *'Each activity of daily life in which we stretch ourselves on behalf of others is faith in action.'*

The second issue Jesus raises is his call to us. I quote from our gospel reading, *'My sheep recognise my voice; I know them, and they follow me.'* John 10:27. A couple of points to take on board here. Firstly, this exchange takes place very soon after Jesus give 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.'* John 10:27-28. 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 secure 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. 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 *vocatio*, which literally refers to God's calling.

So before you get 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 take care for us, he will always be there for us. And that can eventuate in a myriad of ways. The point is, this promise is predicated on us believing in him and being, as faithfully as we can, committed disciples of his.

Closely aligned with this is the notion that in responding to his call, our relationship with him is embellished and even cemented. Mother Teresa put it so very well: *'Faith in action is love, and love in action is service. By transforming that faith into living acts of love, we put ourselves in contact with God himself, with Jesus our Lord.'*

I repeat 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. I finish by making this point: faith is not merely a belief system, but should be a way of life. It should permeate every facet of our daily lives, and so bring a ray of hope and sunshine into our lives, and just as importantly, the lives of others.