

Prayer of the Day:

O Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Good Shepherd who laid down Your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of Your life-giving Word that we may abide in Your Father's house forevermore; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia. (John 10:14 NIV84)

Sermon Text:

It's Good Shepherd Sunday. Good Shepherd Sunday is usually a great Sunday to do a little sheep bashing. We usually hear about how dumb sheep are, always getting caught in thickets and wandering off into the jaws of predators. But the words before us today don't speak of the docile and often vulnerable nature of sheep. Instead, Jesus highlights a positive trait that is well worth our consideration because you and I, well we are Jesus', the Shepherd's, Sheep.

It turns out, that sheep learn very quickly who is taking care of them. Because they really do lack the means to protect themselves, they rely on the support of something or someone else to do so, a shepherd. You can google this or watch it on YouTube should you wish but sheep will learn to listen to the voice of that Shepherd who protects, feeds, and cares for them. One video I watched showed a number of other people approaching the sheep and calling out to them with little to no reaction from the sheep, who seemed to continue grazing as if they had heard nothing at all. Then the Shepherd approached and called out to them. In less than a minute's time, the flock of sheep not only lifted their heads and looked in his direction but actually came running to him. In verse 27, Jesus says, *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*

We usually consider these words to be extremely comforting as God's people but in context, they are not spoken to comfort the people gathered around. I want you to consider those words at the beginning of our lesson now. *²² Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."* We are more familiar with Hanukkah today than the name John gives the celebration. A Jewish individual once joked "Most Jewish festivals are the same. They tried to kill us. We won. Let's eat!"

Hanukkah is the celebration of the failed attempt of the Greeks. Under Antiochus, the Greeks went so far as to outlaw all Jewish worship practices, even sacrificing a pig (an unclean animal) to a Greek god on the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem. Jewish freedom fighters (the Maccabees) finally defeated the Greeks in 164 BC and took control of the Temple in Jerusalem, rededicating the Temple complex and reinstituting the daily sacrifices prescribed in the Law.

Why does any of this matter? Well, consider the question that comes next. *"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."* On a very patriotic holiday, the people come to Jesus standing in Solomon's Colonnade no less (this is the last remaining remnant of Solomon's temple). Recall also the often believed misunderstanding of what the Messiah would do, "Free His people

TEXT: John 10:22–30

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²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one." (NIV84)

from the oppressive rule of their enemies reestablishing the Davidic glory days” and what do you have here? “Jesus, if that’s you, get to it. Tell us so that we can start kicking Rome out!” The people had not been listening.

²⁵ Jesus answered, *“I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.* Just shy of 40 accounts in the Gospels show us miracles that Jesus performed. The actual number is quite higher because on a number of those occasions we are told, “Jesus healed many”. The problem wasn’t with Christ’s clarity here. The problem is that they wanted a different Shepherd.

Now, before we get too pointed with our finger-pointing let’s turn to the doubts that will often plague us as the Shepherd’s Sheep. We’ve all had them. We don’t need to speak them out loud to envision them in our hearts and minds. Maybe they don’t come to us on Hanukkah standing at the last remaining remnant of the temple in Jerusalem (which I believe is the wailing wall these days). But they do come in times that are no less emotionally charged. A loved one is sick and we think they should be better. Finances are tight and we think they should be flush. A marriage is struggling and we think it should be nothing but success. A job is lost ... a friend is gone ... you get the idea. In our doubt, what do we say to God? *“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”* “Get the problems outta here Jesus! This isn’t the way I think things should be going. Bring back the glory days.”

Oh, but dear friends, he has. It just might not look like what we expected. ²⁷ *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”*

You see, Jesus doesn’t speak empty words. His miracles, His care and compassion, the fact that He fulfills every syllable of prophecy, it’s more than enough reason right there to place our trust in Him. Remember, sheep are pretty good at listening. They figure out quickly who has been taking care of them and trust that He will in the future.

Your Shepherd has done more than miracles. As the promised Messiah, He did not come to eradicate sin and sorrow for the 80-90 years of our earthly existence. He could have accomplished that without His own blood, by annihilating the sinful sheep who struggled with the one thing they were supposed to be good at. Instead, He came for those Sheep, His Sheep, and gave them every reason to listen and follow.

Because sin required payment, He made it and stood between us and the snarling wolves of our own wickedness and sin which would doubt the one who has accomplished everything for us. He allowed the Satanic Lion, prowling around for tasty treats to sink its teeth into him. He bled on the cross that the Shepherd might be the perfect lamb of sacrifice for the sheep He so dearly loved. Easter morning is the victory call, the trumpet blast of forgiveness announcing to all that our enemies, Sin, Satan, death and hell have been conquered and that though this world still groans under the weight of sin and sinful sheep wander about in it, eternal life has been won, bought, paid for in full and is ours.

This gift of eternal life, unseen though it may be, is your’s dear friend. Even if there are days and times when it may not appear to be so because nothing can snatch this from Jesus’s hand. Nothing can take us from the hand of our Shepherd. The Father, has given us to Him. Nothing is greater than our God. Jesus, our Shepherd is our God. He and the Father are one in that mindboggling and majestic teaching we call the Holy Trinity. Yes, our salvation is secure. We are secure. No doubt about it.

Jesus our Shepherd doesn’t speak empty words. Unlike the Shepherds on YouTube, He doesn’t call us to Himself just to show off. He has taken care of every foe, every problem, every sin. Though it may not mean I always get what I want in this world, He has provided me with every reason to listen, to follow, even and especially when times are tough. Dear Christian, we are the Shepherd’s Sheep and God Himself has promised, *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.* Amen!