

Bible Study for Fourth Sunday of Easter May 8, 2022

Our text for this Sunday is:

- John 10:22-30
- Psalm 23

Read John 10:22-30 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, 23and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 24So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” 25Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; 26but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 27My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. 30The Father and I are one.”

Do you like this text? How does it make you feel? What is challenging? What is comforting?

The Fourth Sunday in the Easter season is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday.” It might be interesting to ponder why the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd has been so important to Christians through the ages. It might also be interesting to ponder what makes a shepherd or a sheep *good*?

It is also interesting to note the difference between cattle herding and sheep shepherding. Whereas cattle are often herded by “driving” them from behind on horseback, with whips and loud, threatening calls, sheep need to follow their shepherd. With so many “voices” calling out to us each day, we might ask ourselves, how do we recognize (and therefore follow) the voice of God? And are we people who need to be “driven” or threatened, whipped and prodded by God to go in the right direction, or are we people who need to listen or be attentive in order to follow God?

Is there a difference between hearing and listening? If so, how do you see them differently?

Many people say that hearing God is difficult. Do you agree with that sentiment? If so, you are not alone. In the story of Elijah we find him having a really hard time finding God’s voice. He tried finding God’s voice the thunder, the earthquake and in some fire (all places of power that we might expect to hear God’s voice), but Elijah heard God’s speak in the “still, small voice” (also translated as “sheer silence”). How might you cultivate the ability to listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd, the One who gives abundant life, as opposed to the many other voices that seem to be flashier but are not life-giving?

What needs to happen for you to get to know someone? Or said differently, how do you get to know someone? What might Jesus mean when He says in vs 27 “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me?”

Think about this deeply connected knowing that Jesus is speaking to here—Jesus is saying He knows us in the same way He knows the Father. That is, just as Jesus dwells in the Father and the Father dwells in Jesus, so we dwell in Him and He dwells in us. What do you make of this idea that God is so

very close to you that God even dwells in you? What difference does it make in your daily life, when you have a sense of this “God is always present” understanding? And that this same God is someone that who loves you so much that He would rather lay down His own life before He would let any harm come to you? How should this guide your life?

Here's an interesting thought...in vs 26 we read “but you do not believe, *because* you do not belong to my sheep.” The word *because* in Greek is the word *oti* (ὅτι) which is usually translated as “that” but here gets translated as *because*. The switch in word choices would change the translation to “but you do not believe *that* you are from my sheep.” Every translation I’ve seen goes with *because* here, which puts the Judeans’ unbelief as a result of their non-belonging. What are your thoughts on *that* (see what I did there 😊)?

How might the 2nd half of verse 25 (the works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me) apply to how we live our lives?

How might John 14:6 impact your understanding of this Gospel text?

Read Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

This is one of the most famous psalms of all. Why do think that is?

This psalm begins, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.” (v.1) Of course, we all (literally) lack many things in this life! In light of that, what does this verse mean to you?

The Lord leads us in “paths of righteousness” (v.3). This can also be translated as “the right paths.” But then in vs 4 we read about being accompanied through dark valleys. How can a dark valley be a right path? Why or how do you think our Good Shepherd would lead us through dark valleys?

The Hebrew word often translated “follow” is actually closer in meaning to the word “pursue” as in “Goodness and mercy shall *pursue* me.” Why would God pursue us? Do you feel this happening in your life?

Do you see “dwelling in the house of the Lord” as a heavenly or an earthly state?