

**John 10: 22-30 - May 8, 2022**  
**A Sermon Preached by Reverend David Aber**  
**Westminster Presbyterian Church, Akron, Ohio**

His encounter in the temple courtyard reads as if it is some kind of job interview. Did Jesus have the necessary qualifications in the minds of the crowds to be "The Man"? " They wanted a straight answer from Jesus. Was he, or wasn't he, the Messiah? They knew what they wanted, and believed they knew what they needed in their Messiah. They knew his credentials. Of the house of David through his father, Joseph. Educated in the Scripture well enough. A charismatic public speaker. There were the miracles. Jesus of Nazareth was a pretty fair match to both their wants and their needs... but not a perfect match. There was this one gray area: they weren't certain he wanted the job. He kept talking in riddles: I am the bread of life. I am the good shepherd. I am the way, the truth and the life. I am the door of the sheepfold. "Tell us, Jesus, straight out; if the job is offered, will you accept it? Are you the Messiah or not?"

As is the case in every job interview, the interviewing happens in both directions. Jesus was assessing their credentials, too. His list of qualifications for them was short: don't you know already that I am who I am? Just as the sheep of the flock know the voice of their shepherd, my people know my voice. As we know in the Bible, it is hearing that is believing. That would be best. Seeing and believing would be good, too , "Actions speak louder than words," Jesus is willing to let his "works" be his witness. (see also 5:36; 10:38; 14:11) Should we be willing to tell people, "Look at what I do and come to your own conclusions about my faith"?

Some time ago I came across this short story called, "Whom Should You Ask?"

An Amish man was once asked by an enthusiastic young evangelist whether he had been saved, and whether he had accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior? The gentleman replied, "Why do you ask me such a thing? I could tell you anything. Here are the names of my banker, my grocer, and my farm hands. Ask them if I've been saved."

There is a sense that one cannot testify to one's self (see 5:31; 8:13). When Mohammed Ali testified, "I am the greatest," that meant nothing until his works testified to that fact. In a sense, someone claiming, "I am a Christian" is invalid until there is someone or something else that confirms that testimony.

Do we know His voice, asks John the Gospel writer? Do we believe His works? Are we Easter sheep who know the Easter Good Shepherd? What I know about sheep I have read. The sheep, of all creatures in the animal kingdom, is the most likely to stray and be lost. If you have a horse, or a dog, or even a cat, if they escape the fence or the boundaries of your home, they may find their way home. It happens. But a sheep wanders about; he bleats here and there, as much as to say, Dear stranger, show me my way home again. I suppose even Christ's sheep are also likely to wander from the fold. Taking their eye off the great Shepherd, they go into this field and that field, over this hedge and that, and often return home with the loss of their wooly coats a real mess, hungry and thirsty. But at the same time sheep are most useful creatures; they fertilize the land naturally, and thereby prepare it for the seed. They clothe our bodies with wool, and I am told there is not the least part of a sheep but is useful. The adjective 'sheepish' is not understood to be a compliment, yet may

we, in this respect, answer the character of sheep. We are a curious mix in our human nature of waywardness and usefulness.

I preach, then, as from one sheep to another. Most of us seek to live a quiet life, out of the public eye, careful of the concerns and sensibilities of our neighbors and conscientious in our duty to family, workplace, country and church. Like sheep, we can be looked upon by others to be harmless, quiet creatures. The Good Shepherd says to .. us, "Learn of me." What are we to learn? What are we to do? To work miracles? No. To perform wonders? No. "Learn of me, Jesus said, "for I am meek and lowly in heart." Meekness. Humility. "Learn of me."

What are we to learn when if we are a child worried about her safety at home, or the spouse victimized by domestic abuse, or to the person afraid to being stopped by the police because of the color of his skin, or to the police officer who does not know what will happen when he arrives at the scene, or the mid career person afraid of downsizing, or the retiree with no idea what to do without a career, or to those in grief over losing a loved one, or to the person shattered by the disintegration of a relationship. There are times when life seems to conspire against us, to make us feel unsafe and unworthy and unloved. Yet in the face of these trying times, there is a greater reality of God's undying, unconditional and unyielding love. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. No one will snatch them out of my hand!"<sup>1</sup>

The world says in various forms of media that traditional churches are on the way out; and that the younger generations in their 20s who are raising families do not include worship in their busy weekend schedules, let alone Sunday school and worship. The Sunday school is archaic; any elementary aged child can access far more information at her computer than is taught in Sunday school. Yet, in a world that is so focused on the bottom line, on tangible results, on hard data, if you want to see someone who is living a good life, save yourself some time and look first at the religious folks, whose good works often exceed what is preached from the pulpit of this or any church.

This is the context into which we are called to bring a word of hope. We are called to help folks hear the voice of the shepherd and to follow him in their lives. So how do we do this? We do it by being aware of what is going on in our communities. We do it by providing a way out of the lostness — by providing again or for the first time a chance to be invited into a relationship with God. We do this by reminding people of the gifts of God's unmerited grace and forgiveness. We do that by once again bringing people to the baptismal font to remember the gift of grace at baptism and to the table to remember the abundant hope we receive from the body and blood of Christ shared in the sacrament.<sup>2</sup>

The job of Messiah was not an easy one for Jesus to accept, but it was his life's work. The work of following Jesus can be challenging, and is the work of a lifetime. Whatever might be the circumstances, whether you are one of the 99 sheep safe in the sheepfold, or the 1 in 100 who wandered away, you are neither alone nor at risk. Hear his voice of hope. Believe his words of rescue. Trust his work of salvation. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/04/easter-4-c-the-electing-word/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-of-easter-3/commentary-on-john-1022-30>