

## Fourth Sunday in Easter

May 12, 2019

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**John 10:22-30** Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, **23** and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. **24** The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

**25** Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about 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 will 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."

### "Secure with the Shepherd"

Clayton Kershaw put on a pitching clinic for young baseball players. One boy decides to challenge the multiple Cy Young award winner on his grip of the curve ball. That's not how my coach taught me to throw it. He refuses to listen. He has made him mind up. Prove to me that I should pay attention to anything you have to say. Another boy soaks up every word from the major leaguer. He practices what he hears hundreds of times to get the exact hold, arm angle, delivery. He watches video. He combs the internet to find interviews where Kershaw gives any pointers on pitching, any assessment of why he had a successful game or not. He isn't old enough to appreciate all of the professional pitcher's accomplishments, but he trusts him. And he wants to take every word he says to heart so he can be the best pitcher possible.

In John chapter 10, Jesus teaches about the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. It's a relationship that largely depends on your attitude toward Jesus and the way you think about yourself. On one hand people can be very skeptical about all the claims coming from Jesus. We can doubt his abilities and wonder whether his words have any place in our lives. On the other hand, people can be confident in what he says and does. That kind of trust will personally benefit the person who takes the words of Jesus to heart. With Jesus, it's not just about increasing skills or developing talent. It's a relationship. It's about finding a home with Jesus. Jesus wants to be your Shepherd. And he wants you to find security with your Shepherd.

We see hostility toward Jesus from the start of this episode. It was bound to happen. This clash was inevitable. The religious leaders in Jerusalem could do this dance with Jesus, maintaining but doing nothing to release this uncomfortable tension. Eventually it would have to come to a head and they could have it out in a dramatic confrontation.

John 10:22 tells us it was December and Jesus returns to Jerusalem to celebrate what we now know as Hanukkah. Jesus is teaching in the temple area. Like a pack of dogs surrounding a helpless rabbit, the religious leaders corner Jesus. They've got him where

they want him. Now they will get what they want from him. They interrogate him like a bad cop in a detective drama: **“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”** (John 20:24) They know he is guilty. They just want him to confess what they already know so they can dish out the punishment they’ve already decided for him.

Only thing is, Jesus isn’t some frightened little bunny surrounded by that pack of dogs. Jesus never gives them the direct answers they are after. He stands tall. Relaxed and confident, gives unmistakably clear answers. They’ve got all the evidence they need from what he has been doing and teaching all along. He even gives them something more: two extraordinary claims about himself.

These claims can lead to confrontation or comfort. It all depends on how you see your relationship with the Shepherd.

Let’s start with the second claim first. Jesus says: **“I and the Father are one.”** (John 10:30) Jesus is claiming to be equal in essence and substance with the Father. There is no mistaking what he is saying with this claim. In fact, in verse 31 the Jews react by picking up stones to execute him for blasphemy. This kind of claim makes Jesus either crazy or dangerous or deserving of death. Those with power in the religious realm have already decided Jesus is a threat and needs to be eliminated. Pilate with Jesus on trial before him has to decide if Jesus is dangerous or just plain crazy. The rest of us know his claims make him dangerous. But just what are we determined to do with this dangerous Jesus?

In the world of sports, our opinions count for more than statistics. You can have your favorite basketball team, you can have your own evaluation of the NFL draft, you can make your case all day long for the best pitcher in baseball. We carry that standard over into other areas of our lives. If I don’t feel like something is true, then I choose not to believe it.

Have you notices how feelings have replaced facts in our world? We shake our heads in dismay at the way the Jewish leaders treat Jesus. But in a very basic sense, they have only elevated their feelings over the facts Jesus has provided them. And it’s not just them. We feel like we would have to swallow too much of our pride to accept everything Jesus says. We feel it is unnecessary to follow him wherever he leads. We feel no need for his grasp on our lives. It’s a stranglehold that is too restrictive, too confining, too limiting. It just feels way to arrogant to assert there is only once voice every person on the planet should follow. After all, I feel secure in who I am. I feel strong enough because of what i’ve done with my life. I feel secure in what I believe.

It might provide for hours of entertainment to debate who is right in the world of sports. But in other areas of life, it can get me into trouble. I can feel like my mom is the best mom on the planet. So can you. But if I feel like she doesn’t have my best interests in mind, that affects me. If I feel like her rules don’t apply to me; like I don’t have to do my homework when she says; obey her curfew; treat her words with respect; that’s different. I’ve damaged my relationship with my mom. And it’s a relationship that is designed to benefit me.

Here's the surprising thing about the way Jesus treats this confrontation with the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He doesn't give up on them because of their suspicion. He doesn't toss them aside after their disrespect. First, he lays out the evidence as clearly as possible for them: **"The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep."** (John 10:25,26) Then he makes an appeal even to those dogs who have bared their fangs at him: **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."** (John 10:27) He even provides the benefits of being one of his sheep for them: **"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."** (John 10:28)

Jesus shows us he wants to be our shepherd. Jesus shows generosity instead of restrictiveness. Jesus shows compassion instead of confinement. Jesus gives instead of takes away. Jesus can make promises to potential and existing sheep because he was ruined right before the Sanhedrin while they made their accusations. Jesus was destroyed by the sham justice at the hands of Pontius Pilate. He was snatched from the hands of one cowardly leader to the next. Finally he was transferred into the hands of military executioners so he could face death.

Jesus was able to go through all this injustice, to swallow his pride, to let go of his ego because he was confident in who he was. When Jesus said: **"I and the Father are one,"** it wasn't just a slogan. (John 10:30) Jesus is confident in his relationship with His Father and certain in His life's work to carry out his mission. Jesus backs up that claim of being one with the Father by his resurrection from the grave. His resurrection is just one of his works that prove who he really is. The answer the Jewish leaders were looking for was right in front of them the entire time.

Jesus is the Christ. You can still have your opinions. You can keep your feelings about Jesus. And none of that changes him. But how you treat Jesus does change you. If your reaction to Jesus is one of skepticism and doubt, you will lose out on the benefits flowing from a relationship with the Good Shepherd. If you have trust he is who he says he is; if you are confident of his claims to be really and truly God, boundless blessings will flow from that relationship with your Good Shepherd.

Today we celebrate mothers. We celebrate their love and their sacrifices. There are so many things they do that never get noticed or recognized, much less rewarded. But moms are at their best when they provide a sense of safety for their children. When they allow them to explore and experience life. When they give them freedom. Even when they provide them with the opportunities to make mistakes and fail. But moms let us know we will always have a welcome. There will always be security with the love of a mother.

We live in a chaotic world. But our Good Shepherd surpasses the love of even our mothers. Jesus is the Shepherd who knows each one of us intimately and cares about us infinitely. Jesus is the Shepherd who invites us to let go of our egos. Jesus calls us to embrace his voice of truth that trumps our feelings. Jesus provides the freedom that lets us give up the need to be in control of our lives and decide how we want to live. Jesus is the Shepherd who provides safety from hostility and shelter from enemies.

Jesus calls his sheep to hear and follow because no one else can give what Jesus can. Instead of being skeptical about his claims, we can marvel in his promises. Instead of rejecting his claim of control over our lives, we can rejoice in the blessings we get from life with Jesus. We can keep investigating. We can continue growing every time we hear his word. We can follow faithfully. We can experience more blessings under the shepherding care of Jesus.

Fascinated by the Good Shepherd, we can explore what it means to be his sheep. You have life with God. You have life grounded in who God is, joined in an intimate relationship with God, led continually toward God. You have life that renews and refreshes your daily existence. Life pulses through the very being of the believer. Life makes you stronger as your trust increases. Life that blossoms to reach its full flower in the glorious gardens of heaven. Your life is secure with your Good Shepherd. Amen.