



kings were called shepherd of their people, and carried rods and staffs as emblems of their office. The title came to have special significance for the God of Israel. To say ‘the Lord is my shepherd’ invokes all the richness of theological and political backgrounds as well as the pastoral.

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters; <sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.

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

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

<sup>6</sup> Surely 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/forever.

John 10:22-30

Rosemary Dawson

Throughout John’s Gospel, responses to Jesus vary widely. Jesus has been in Jerusalem for a while (from Chapter 7), teaching regularly within the temple area. His teaching evokes much discussion concerning his identity, origins, and authority, and results in a division among the people. Some believe that he is the Messiah, and others believe that he is demon-possessed, or worse, a blasphemer who deserves to die. Now, following his claim to be the Good Shepherd he is again questioned. He, in turn, raises up their responsiveness to him, and points out that it is only with the eyes of faith that one can see the truth concerning Jesus.

<sup>22</sup> At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem.

It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> So 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.”

<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice.

I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> The Father and I are one.”

## Sermon

## Straight Up

This week I came across a funny depiction of married life. The husband notices his wife is upset and asks “Honey, what’s wrong?” And the wife replies “If you have to ask, I’m not going to tell you.” That’s how today’s gospel lesson feels to me, and I bet to a lot of you too. Some Judeans, who by the way are miffed at Jesus, say to him “Look, you’ve been keeping us guessing long enough. Tell us, in plain Hebrew, or Greek or even Aramaic, if you are the Messiah or not.” They want the answer straight up. But Jesus’ reply is less than helpful. Basically, he says “if you already know, you don’t need to ask. If you need to ask, you will never know.” Gee, thanks for the info, Jesus, really.

I feel for the Judeans in today’s Scripture. So many times in my life I have said “OK, God, just tell me.” And generally, I only hear crickets. But here’s the thing – I’m listening, continually listening, not just to understand, but also to follow – to live according to what I hear. That seems to be what is behind Jesus’ very weird statement to the Judeans today. “You do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. And I know them and they follow me, and I give them eternal life.” It sounds so convoluted to us, and even offensive, for Jesus to reject those questioning him as ‘not mine’.

But here is the key – you do not believe. We are bound to be miffed just at that word. But to a Jew, steeped in the Covenant, it all ties together. To believe, in the Hebraic mind, is to be aware of a word or action (especially of God’s word and actions), to acknowledge their validity and act accordingly. In other words, Jesus’ sheep have heard his word, and seen his work. They have accepted its truth and now live out of that certainty. Did those who wanted it ‘straight up’ not hear? Apparently they had, Jesus said ‘I told you and you do not believe’. Did they not see his works? Likely they had. And it left some believing Jesus was the Messiah, while others thought him a charlatan and still others concluded he was straight up demonic. And some were simply left floundering amid all the opinions and gossip.

For whatever reason these Judeans could not seem to connect the dots, between Jesus’ words and actions, and the heritage of their faith. And so, they missed the most important aspect that underlies all belief, from the first day of the covenant to now. It is not just about correct knowledge, and not just about good actions. It is all about relationship – as God said to Israel at Sinai, “I shall be your God and you shall be my people.” (Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:11-12, Jeremiah 7:22a, 23) or as Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear my voice - and I know them. They follow me - and I give them eternal life.’”

The Judeans may have been struggling with something we all tend to fall into – the preference to know the information and stop short of knowing the informer; the pattern of doing a task, even a good work, and seldom engaging the one we seek to serve. But for Jesus his priority was and is to know and be known. That is, in fact, the whole of eternal life – as Jesus himself prayed, “that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3); or as Paul said, “that I may know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and become like him, even in his death” (Philippians 3:10). It is the gift of pure relationship that has been God’s intent from the creation of humanity – that we may be one with him. And it is because the depth of that relationship is so vital that Jesus can claim “I and the Father are One.” It is who Jesus claims to be, but more importantly it is the relationship, the Life, Jesus invites us to enter.

That is the Gospel – Straight Up. Amen.

\*Hymn

Faithful Shepherd

insert

## **Joys and Concerns**

### **Prayers of the People**

Loving God, thank you for your faithfulness and goodness to us always. Thank you for coming to us in Jesus Christ, to seek us and offer us a life-giving relationship with you. Thank you for your Spirit, who calls us, opens us to your revelation and empowers us to believe and live as your faithful flock. And so we come, O God, eager to know your presence, power and grace in our lives.

We pray for your church and for this congregation. May this be a place where we can hear your voice, see your work and come to believe. May we find joy in living in relationship to you and all your people. And may we find courage to witness to your love through all our words and actions, here in our community and throughout the world.

We pray for our world and all its leaders. May they have the opportunity to hear the good news of your grace and grow in faithfulness, that they may establish your ways of peace and justice among the nations. We pray also for all who seek you today. May your Spirit uphold all who long to know your goodness. Grant your healing to the ill, your comfort to the sorrowful and your aid to the needy. We especially lift up... and we thank you for....

We praise you, Wondrous God, for all your lovingkindness towards us through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray....

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Choral Response**

Remember Me

#### **Offering**

The goodness and mercy of God overflows in our lives, as we walk with him in faith and faithfulness. In these moments, we are privileged to share the life of the gospel by what we say and what we do. May our offerings be given with joy.

Offertory Music      "Rejoice, the Lord Is King"  
John Darwall, Arr. Phillip Keveren

Shepherd God, we thank you for the ways in which you have welcomed us in your love and called us to follow you. May these gifts and our lives embrace others with the good news of your loving-kindness . Amen

#### **Doxology**

(choose the one that is best for your faith)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below,  
praise him above ye heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise God all creatures here below  
Praise God for all that Love has done; Creator, Christ and Spirit One. Amen

#### **\*Hymn**

He Leadeth Me

PH 370

**\*Common Commission**

**Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

**\* Benediction**

Go now into the world

and may the amazing grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, and the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with each and every one of you, today and always.  
(2 Corinthians 13:13 MSG adj)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

**Postlude**

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music provided by Chris Harris and Lynne Walker