

John 10:22-30

Easter 4, Supplement Series C, April 17, 2016

Theme: The Good Shepherd cares for his sheep
I. Those who are not his sheep won't listen
II. His sheep listen to words of great comfort

INJ Someone is always talking. Talking heads on the TV. Talk on the radio. Talking over the back fence. Talking on the phone (I think people can actually talk on their phones, right?). Then there is the "talking" we do on Snapchat and Twitter, with messaging and texting and such things. I am talking to you now. We like to talk.

It is harder to listen. You need to give energy in order to hear what was said and also understand it – to consider what it means and how it affects you. Listening takes patience. To listen, you have to make connections, to evaluate whether what was said is true or not.

Some things are worth listening to. They have value even though it takes effort to hear. Some things that get said are not worth listening to. Perhaps we ought to turn them off. Shut them down. Unfriend and block and delete. It may be hard to do, but just because something is said doesn't mean we have to listen to it.

When Jesus does the talking, however, we want to listen, don't we? It may be easier to avoid Jesus than it is to avoid the TV or the news feed or our friends, but the message Jesus gives is so much more valuable! His words are life for our soul. They mean forgiveness and eternal life, too. Don't close your ears to the message Jesus proclaims! Listen to him as a sheep listens to its shepherd.

Sheep need a shepherd. Without him they are helpless against any enemy. On their own, sheep would starve and dehydrate and die. The shepherd cares for his sheep by talking to them. His voice gives them direction in the wilderness. It calls them to come close when they have wandered. The shepherd warns of danger and he uses his words to show his love. A sheep that won't listen is soon dead and gone from the flock. Today Jesus calls himself our Good Shepherd. He cares for his sheep. Those who are not his sheep won't listen to him, but we, his sheep, listen and hear his words of great comfort.

The Gospel lesson lets us watch as Jesus is confronted by his

enemies in the Temple courtyard. Jesus was walking among the pillars of Solomon's Colonnade, when the opposition gathered around him, encircling him. They had him surrounded! They were looking for something to use against Jesus. They wanted him to make a blunder, to say what they could twist and use to their own purposes.

In the most inviting and calming way they asked Jesus a simple question: "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." You might think this would be a great opportunity for Jesus to make a clear confession. He could explain his mission to seek and to save the lost. They were inviting him to speak the Good News!

But it was a trap. They did not want to hear what Jesus said. If he said he was the Christ, they would accuse him of being a political insurgent. They thought of the Christ as bringing freedom from the Romans, and if Jesus admitted his intentions, they would turn him over to the authorities. If Jesus, however, denied that he was the Christ, then they could ignore him and use his words against him.

What was their goal? It was to get rid of Jesus, but that was only part of their plan. They really wanted to get to the people. To have their attention and support. To be able to control and influence. To make people depend on them for what they needed. Take out the shepherd, and they would have their way with the sheep.

One of the major points to remember today is that we are sheep. It isn't the most complimentary description. Sheep ought to be terrified to exist. They don't have any defenses against enemies. They are not smart. Or fast. They don't blend in. The sheep's enemies drool over their prey. We are sheep. The devil, the world, our own sinful flesh target us, and we ought to be terrified at the risk we face. We cannot overcome them, nor can we escape.

But we have a Shepherd. Jesus defends us against the enemies. He fought the battle and won the victory. Look at him standing in the middle of that hostile crowd in the temple. They were pressing hard, and the Good Shepherd spoke clearly: "I did tell you, but you do not believe ... you do not believe because you are not my sheep." Jesus had made clear who he is. He is God, the great I AM. His mission was to save sinners. Not to be a political activist or to secure power and wealth. Jesus came to serve. To sacrifice his life in

place of sinners. To ransom us by paying the price with his blood.

Not only did Jesus say it, he showed it. He healed the sick and drove out demons. He fed thousands and raised the dead. Jesus is able to forgive sins because he is also able to make the lame walk! But these enemies of his would not listen to the clear message. They would not follow the Good Shepherd. They were not his sheep.

Despite all their talk and tactics, the enemies did not entrap Jesus. They did not silence him or scatter his followers. Even though they captured and killed Jesus, he still won the victory. He rose from the dead to announce freedom from sin and death and the devil. The enemies were defeated and humiliated. The sheep have been rescued. We are safe.

I need the reminder that my Good Shepherd Jesus cares for me, his sheep. So many do so much to tear me away from him. All the talk is like a wedge that gets in between shepherd and sheep. I become afraid. What if I say the wrong thing? Am I walking into a trap? Sometimes I am still terrified. Jesus shepherds me by speaking clearly. Those who won't listen to Jesus are not his sheep. They don't win in the end. Though they howl and growl and circle around, they won't succeed in eating sheep.

It helps to identify the prowling lion and the wolf in sheep's clothing. A clear sign is what they do with Jesus' words. Will they listen or won't they? If there are excuses and intentional misunderstandings and lack of follow through and persistent stubbornness, they are not listening. They are not sheep.

We all know someone who doesn't listen to advice. You are patient, and you are persistent; you are calm and you are clear, but they won't listen! Maybe you are the one who won't listen. Jesus cares for his sheep enough to say that those who will not listen to his words are not sheep. Watch out for them! Don't be one of them!

Sheep love to listen to their Good Shepherd. What he says is precious. It gives life to our soul and it feeds our faith. Jesus speaks to us in his gospel word and he gives us great comfort. Did you hear what the Shepherd said? "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."

Fearful sheep often wonder if anybody cares what is happening

to them. We worry that our problems are out of control; that we will never survive. Jesus says, "I know my sheep." He knows your needs and your fears. He understands what you feel. All the complications and convolutions are clear to him. He isn't distracted by the immediate, either. He has in mind what is best for eternity.

The Shepherd did not just sit on the sidelines and watch over the sheep. He came to take on our flesh and blood. He stood in our place under the law, and kept it perfectly for us. He sacrificed himself, the innocent for the guilty. Earlier in this chapter of John's Gospel Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Listen again: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Your sins are forgiven!

No better news could be heard! How we love to hear it! Don't you have great comfort when you are reminded that the Good Shepherd knows his sheep? He knows the little joys of your life, too. And the things that make your service in the kingdom rewarding. He gives you smiles and blesses you with contentment. Listen to him speak plainly about singing and praising and rejoicing in his words.

The words of Jesus are never more important than when danger lurks. Remember how I said that sheep should always be terrified? Powerful enemies seek our soul, but listen to the Good Shepherd: "No one can snatch them out of my hand." He knows you, and he delivers you from danger. He has secured your rescue by putting his name on you in Baptism. He maintains the defenses and strengthens them by his gospel in word and sacrament. You are safe in his hands. No one can steal you from Jesus when you listen to him. He knows you, and he has made you his dear one.

When I hear what the Good Shepherd says, I have peace. I can rest. I trust he will do what he promises. I know he will never fail. When I worry again, he calms me with those precious words. I know you. I give you eternal life. No one can snatch you from my hand.

We live in a dangerous place for spiritual sheep. Many religious words are violent and deadly. Some are sickeningly sweet but just as poisonous. Talk. Talk. Talk. Who are you listening to? Put your ears on the Good Shepherd. Listen to his gracious promises and you have great comfort! The Good Shepherd cares for his sheep. SDG Amen.