

## Keep Listening to Your Good Shepherd John 10:27-30

*27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will 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."*

It was winter in Palestine, about three or four months before Jesus completed his saving work with his suffering, death, and resurrection. He was in Jerusalem for the eight-day Festival of Dedication, also called Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights. He spent much of his time at the temple. Then a group of people gathered around him making this demand: *"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."* Jesus had done quite a bit of public speaking. According to them he never made the claim that these people were looking for. It's not that he didn't know who he was or what his mission in life was. The problem was that most people had a wrong idea about the Christ. They were not waiting for a Savior from sin. They wanted a Messiah who would free them from Roman rule and make Israel a world power again.

Jesus did testify that he was the Christ. He didn't just tell them; he showed them with the miracles he did in his Father's name. But they did not believe in him because they were not his sheep. Jesus gave many people many opportunities to listen to him. On the night of his arrest, he told the mob, *"Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching"* (Matthew 26:55). By his teaching people should have known who he was. But sadly, many did not believe. With his teaching and his miracles Jesus testified that he was the Christ. So why would they not believe?

People did not believe nor see their need for him. They didn't recognize who their real enemy was. The enemy did not come dressed in a soldier's uniform. He didn't come armed with a sword or spear. The world's most powerful armies could not defeat this enemy. The enemy that held each of them captive was Satan himself. And the only one who could defeat Satan was God himself. That's what Jesus testified about when He said: *"I and the Father are one."* With his teaching and his miracles Jesus proved he was the Christ. He told people how he had come to destroy the devil's work. Some of his miracles he performed involved driving actual demons out of people. Yes, Jesus is the Christ that God sent to defeat the world's worst enemy.

One reason people in our world today don't believe in Jesus may be because they don't see a great need for such a Savior. They don't see how damning sin is which infects every one of us. Like ignorant sheep people wander aimlessly through life. They're not aware of the eternal disaster that awaits them. We must be stay alert to the dangers of sin. We are sheep. Scripture calls us sheep not because we're such warm and cuddling and adorable creatures. The prophet Isaiah hit it on the head: *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way"* (53:6). Like wandering sheep, we easily get lured away from our Lord. We become so enamored with this life that we soon lose sight of the next. Jesus says, *"My sheep hear my voice."* How easy it is to drift away from God's Word. Soon our sin doesn't seem so deadly. We see sin as something we can easily tolerate, even enjoy. Soon the ferocious lion that seeks to devour us becomes a pet kitty with which we wish to play. Before we know it, we're lost forever.

That certainly would be the case if our Good Shepherd had not entered our world. As the Christ, Jesus is the only shepherd who can rescue us sheep. And he tells us who his real sheep are: *"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand."* Jesus loves his sheep. But it's not

because they're so loyal to him. It's not because they always follow a straight and narrow path where he wants them to go. He loves them because as he told the crowd surrounding him: *"My father has given them to me."* God entrusted Jesus with the care of us sheep. And boy do we need him. We're such easy prey for any predator. Thankfully our Good Shepherd doesn't not run away when Satan comes on the attack. Our Good Shepherd faced him valiantly. He even laid down his life for us. He became a sacrificial lamb to suffer hell's punishment for everyone. Yes, the iniquity of us all was laid on him (Isaiah 53:6). When he had finished paying for sin, he lay lifeless in a tomb—but not for long. He removed the sting of death. He left the old evil foe completely powerless. Jesus rose to life to prove his claim to be the Christ. Now look what's left for us sheep. Jesus says, *"I give them eternal life."* He promises we will never perish eternally. He assures us that no one or nothing can snatch us out of his hand. His love for his sheep is shared by the love of his Father. As Jesus testifies, *"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* Since God is for us, it doesn't matter who or what may oppose us.

Today two young people will stand before this congregation to confirm their faith in Jesus. Each will make a solemn vow to remain faithful followers of our Lord. Many of us here have made that vow ourselves. We know it will not be easy for them just like it isn't easy for us. And it's not because they're entering a time of life when young people test their independence. The reason it won't be easy, is because they are sheep. Sheep wander. Sheep stray. Sheep need a good shepherd. And by God's grace we have one—the Lord Jesus Christ. All of us need to keep listening to his voice. Only Jesus can keep us on that narrow path that leads to eternal life. So keep listening. The gospel must be part of our everyday lives.

Today we are blessed with two newly confirmed members. Pray for them. Encourage them. Urge them to keep listening, keep reading, keep studying God's Word. Remind them of their baptism where God washed them clean of sin and made them his own. Direct them to the Lord's Table where they can receive Christ's body and blood for their forgiveness. Only by these means of grace do we stay close to Jesus and remain faithful to him our entire life.

What a blessing that you have come to God's house for this special confirmation service. Both of our confirmands have chosen a special Bible verse that will help them keep the promises they make today. Trinity chose for her confirmation verse, John 15:5: *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* As Trinity stays connected to Jesus through Word and sacrament, she is sure to have a fruitful, faith-filled life. Gabriel chose Philippians 4:14: *"I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."* Gabriel will remain content no matter what life throws at him because his Savior gives him strength to get through the evils of each day.

Only by word and sacrament can we know Jesus and his love. It was love that led him to lay down his life for us. And then he took up his life again to assure us of eternal life and protect us from every enemy we face. We know he loves us. He became a lamb for sacrifice. He was pierced, wounded, and crushed for our sins. By his wounds we are healed. Keep listening to your Good Shepherd. You'll remain faithful for life.

*May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*