



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
3 Stanmore Bay Road,
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.
www.ststephenswgp.org.nz

Sermon

Jesus: Son of God; Glorified; Empowerer

John 10:22-30; Acts 9:36-43; Rev 7:9-17

8th May 2022

© 2022 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

Last week, we heard the three accounts of meeting the Risen Jesus. As we continue through this Easter season, we are following the threads of reviewing what he taught and did in the light of the Resurrection, we see some incidents in the life of the early Church in the book of Acts and we have a privileged view of the heavenly courtroom and the glorified Lamb of God.

Today's gospel is from the time of the Festival of Lights (also called Hanukah) which occurs in December. It commemorates the rededication of the Temple in 165BC after it had been desecrated by Greek invaders. We know that the Jewish readings set for that feast focussed on the failure of temple leadership during the Maccabean period. They used Ezekiel 34 which rebukes leaders who seek personal profit from the people as false shepherds who do not care for the sheep. It was with those readings in people's ears that Jesus spoke of himself as the good shepherd.

Through his ministry he has forgiven sins and commanded the storm to be peaceful. He had spoken about the Torah basing his teaching on his personal authority not on precedent as no other Rabbi would dare to do. To a first-century Jew, all of these things would have been understood as the actions of a person claiming to possess divine authority. He had healed the sick, the blind, the deaf, the lame and raised the dead – as the Messiah was prophesied to do.

Yet, he had not said openly that he was the expected Messiah. So they came and asked for a clear answer: "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

We know he did not fit their idea of Messiah. He was not going to be the military hero who would drive the Romans out of Israel. Because of this misunderstanding, he could not announce his role to them in simple terms; his actions had to tell the story for him.

Jesus gave them the counterchallenge that the issue was not of ignorance but of will. He had given them the information they needed and the miracles he had worked were also proof enough. Therefore the problem was in their hearts and minds - not in the evidence. He said they did not believe because they were not his sheep. Earlier Jesus emphasised that his sheep know his voice and they follow him; they won't follow a stranger. As we get to know him we learn to recognise his voice, his nature, his calling to us.

When I was looking for the parish where I was to serve after my curacy, we went for interview at a parish in Exeter in the south of England. It looked ideal; it ticked all my boxes. Yet by the end of the day looking around the parish, I knew the Lord was saying, "Not this one." I didn't hear words, it was an inner knowledge but it was quite clear. Conversely, there have been times when someone has told me that God was saying something to them and I have thought, "But that is not how he is - the Lord would never say that." As you get to know him, you learn to recognise his voice more clearly.

If the people who were interrogating Jesus had been of his flock they would have responded to him, to his voice, just the way a shepherd could call his sheep and they would come to him. But sheep of another flock would ignore that shepherd.

Jesus went on to say words which are so comforting to those who choose to follow him: "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 will snatch them out of my hand." [verses 27-28]

It is worth breaking that down so we can pay close attention to it:

My Sheep:	Jesus:
• listen to my voice;	• knows them;
• follow me;	• gives them eternal life;
• shall never perish.	• will take care that no one will snatch them out of his hand.

Do you get them? Absorb it into your soul:

- As you have responded to Jesus, Jesus knows you. You are not distant from him.
- As you 'hear' (or perceive in some way) his voice you follow him.
- He assures you of his gift of eternal life, that means you will never perish and he protects you in that relationship. No one will snatch you out of his hand.

Are we afraid of being losing that relationship? Jesus assures us that the Father has given us to him and no one can snatch us out of his hand. We are safe in the care of Jesus and in the hand of God the Father. As he continues he speaks of his unity with the Father. They work together to bring salvation, with one accord and one purpose. But their unity is more than a mere alliance; Jesus here claims they are one.

Wow! They asked if he were the Messiah (meaning Jewish royalty) and they received a far greater answer! The Christ - yes but more - he claimed to be equal with the Father, one with the God who is greater than all.

He said, "I and the Father, we are one." He does not mean just in this matter of protecting the believer. That is a matter of outward operation, he means one essentially. The Greek demonstrates this, since the adjective "one" is neuter not masculine. Had he meant we are one person, he would have used the masculine adjective, but the neuter points to substance not personhood. The Father and the Son are two distinct persons but of one substance. But more of that on Trinity Sunday!

As we look back on his teaching from the post-Easter viewpoint knowing about the crucifixion and resurrection, we can see that by dying for our sins he is able to grant those who follow him eternal life. We can choose to hear him, to follow him and to trust him as Lord and Saviour.

What consequence did it have for the disciples after the resurrection and Pentecost? In the book of Acts we hear of more of Peter's ministry as he travelled around the congregations of Judea. You will remember that he and the other disciples had already been sent out on ministry trips in pairs by Jesus to the villages of Galilee to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, cast out demons and raise the dead. In Jerusalem, soon after Pentecost he had healed the crippled beggar in the authority of Jesus. Acts 5:12 tells us: "The Apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people." On this tour, he had just been used to heal a man who had been paralysed for eight years in Lydda. Then he was urgently called to Joppa (modern-day Jaffa) where a Christian woman called Tabitha had died.

It is very clear that he followed the model he had learnt from watching Jesus raise Jairus' daughter. He had been with Jesus with Jairus' daughter. Like Jesus, he cleared the grieving people out of the room, and after praying he simply commanded the girl to get up. Jesus commanded, "Talitha koum!" That means, "Little girl, arise." Peter addressed the body of this disciple - already washed and prepared for burial and said almost the same, "Tabitha, koum!" We see here the disciples following in the footsteps of Jesus in his ministry and miraculous signs.

The third viewpoint today is another glimpse of the worship in heaven from John's Revelation. Again there vast numbers of people and of angels worshipping around the throne. They say, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." And "...the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water."

Jesus is called the Lamb of God because he is the ultimate sacrifice who has fulfilled all the sacrifices of the Old Testament. He is seen at the centre of the throne room of heaven, receiving worship from men and angels. He is declared to be the source of salvation – which only God can give. He is called the shepherd who leads his flock to springs of living water to eternal provision and the abundance of the Holy Spirit.

If we struggle with belief, we would do well to check ourselves – is it because we choose not to believe? It is quite clear to me that many avoid belief because if they were to believe in God they would be accountable and they will not allow that. Others are too content with superficial objections which allow them to avoid hard thinking and facing the challenges involved. But let us not fool ourselves - the real issue is in the will - not the mind.

Church, we can rest in the security of the Father's hand – knowing we are safe in him. We can join the worship of heaven as we honour the one who gave everything for us that he might lead us to his sheepfold and water us with his Spirit.