

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2022**  
**Easter 4 (C)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**NT: Acts 9.36-end**  
**NT: Revelation 7.9-end**  
**G: John 10.22-30**

I heard this story about the detective Sherlock Holmes and his close associate Mr. Watson. Watson is knowledgeable, but he always misses the obvious. Holmes and Watson are on a camping tour. In the middle of the night Holmes wakes up and gives Dr. Watson a nudge. “Watson” he says, “look up in the sky and tell me what you see.” I see millions of stars, Holmes,” says Watson. “And what do you conclude from that, Watson?” Watson thinks for a moment. He says, “astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. Theologically, I see that God is all-powerful, and we are insignificant. What does it tell you, Holmes? Holmes says - “Watson! Someone has stolen our tent.” How is it that people can miss the obvious? On every page of this Gospel, John is telling us who Jesus is. Sometimes we miss the evident! What does that have to do with the gospel

Today we hear Jesus’ walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon during the festival of the rededication of the temple. This was an important place; it was the porch on the eastern side of the Temple’s outer court and was called the “Porch of Judgement”. From this location, the King would make judgements and exercise justice for those who were brought before him. Here Jesus, the embodiment of justice, is walking, in this place of justice.

While in Jesus’ day, the land had been lost again, this time to the Romans. It is into this situation that the question of Jesus identity is raised again. Questions like.... “How long will you keep us in suspense?”. Local leaders argued with him in public. They asked Jesus: Are you

the Messiah?” And how does Jesus’ answer all these questions? He says, “I have told you, and you do not believe. You do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” Our Lord Jesus Christ, during his earthly ministry, knew very well how to speak to the people about his person using simple words. The images or examples Jesus used in his teachings were taken from the daily lives of the people whom he addressed.

Now Speaking of sheep and voices, Jesus is pictured as the good shepherd several times throughout scripture. We read a beautiful story in Luke 15 where the shepherd leaves the 99 of them to go and find the one stray sheep. The well -known story speaks to most people, because at one time or another we have all been a stray lamb. The words of Jesus that we heard today, broadens, and deepens that promise. In the Old Testament, the image of the Shepherd is often applied to God as well as to the leaders of the people. The book of Exodus represents Yahweh several times as a Shepherd. The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel compare God’s care and protection of His people to that of a shepherd.

Jesus makes three statements in today’s gospel.

1)He knows his sheep and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Jesus knows each one of us and he loves us as we are with all our limitations. As C.S Lewis writes- “God whispers to us in our pleasures, He speaks to us in our consciences, and he shouts to us in our pain! Jesus tells us to trust the voice inside that promises us life, that comforts us. Most commentators I read emphasized that the problem we face today is not following Jesus but that the challenge for us is in just not recognizing his voice. There are many voices all around us that strive to gain our attention. Many of those voices want our wealth, our energy, or our time. And yes, we are called to follow him, but to do so, we need at least to be able to recognize his voice. The relationship here is direct and personal.

2) He gives eternal life, and we will never perish. Jesus receives us into his sheepfold and gives us faith through baptism and claims us as his own and then he strengthens that faith in confirmation. Jesus presents himself in Holy Communion. At the Eucharist we truly “taste and see the goodness of the Lord,” and when we partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord in Holy Communion, Jesus assures us, “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

3) He protects his flock by placing them in the loving hands of his Father. The sheep are weak animals. They are so vulnerable that they must be guarded by a loving shepherd against all dangers. That is what we are. As human beings we are vulnerable. But in weakness, we have strength. To further assure us of God’s goodness and care Jesus says, “No one can take them out of my hand, the father and I are one.”

Some early Native Americans had a practice that on the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, after learning necessary skills, he was put to one final test. He was placed in a dense forest to spend the night alone. On this night, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of a thick woods! Every time a twig snapped; he visualized a wild animal ready to jump on him. The dawn broke and the first rays of sunlight entered the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path.

Then, to his astonishment, he beheld the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was his father. He had been there all night long. While the boy sat in darkness and sensed danger, he was safe in the hands of his father all along. To further assure us of God’s care, Jesus is telling us that we belong to him. He offers us eternal life and that nobody can take us out of his hands! The father and he are one.

The word “one” when translated from the Greek is saying that he and God are united in the work that they do. Jesus and his father are one in their resolve to heal the world. Perhaps it

is not simply by chance that the most popular psalm is the twenty-third psalm and many of us know its words by heart, it is the psalm that shapes our image of the shepherd God. Christ has promised to remain with us as the good shepherd even to the end of time, so that in life and in death we may be confident that we belong not to the powers of evil and death.

In today's Second Reading from the Book of Revelation, we hear St. John describe a vision that he had. He points out that "the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd and will guide them to springs of the water of life." But in this sentence from today's Second Reading, he uses this word in a strange way. This lamb is also a shepherd. This lamb, of course, is the Risen Jesus. This lamb is our Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep and it is he who has given us the abundance of eternal life. So, as we gather at the table today, may we clearly hear the voice of Jesus our good shepherd. Today's reading has implications for us, we are challenged to share his worries for those who are in difficulty, for those who suffer injustice, for the sick and the tired.

I want to end my sermon by praying a collect from the Book of Common Prayer: "O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of thy people: Grant that when we hear his voice, we may know him who calleth us each by name, and follow where he doth lead, who, with thee and the Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

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