

Imperishable & Unsnatchable!

Meditation on John 10: 22-30

April 17, 2016

*At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 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.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 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. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.'*

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My mom and dad came to visit us on Monday. They brought more stuff that they couldn't fit in their new home in a retirement community. Stuff that they thought maybe we would want or could find homes for. The stuff came in bags and cardboard boxes, loosely wrapped in newspaper. And there it sat until Friday when I went on a treasure hunt, looking for interesting things Jim and I could donate to the silent auction for our youth's trip to Montreat.

Here's some of what I found! This is a newspaper dated Feb. 3, 1951.

One of the front-page stories caught my eye. "Freeze predicted for all of Florida tonight. Real winter griped Florida today. Two inches of snow fell in St. Augustine, blanketing the Oldest City in white." Check out the full front page. See the children making a snowman!

I also found some sad mementos that I imagine some collectors would love to have. Here is a Washington, D.C. newspaper from November 1963--the day President Kennedy was shot. There are other moving photos from that day.

And there are other interesting--and less sad--finds. Grandma saved 4 books of patterns for decorating huck towels from 1937. I didn't even know what "huck towels" were! This next find is even more exciting than huck towels. My mom collected baseball cards and kept them in a little photo album. I learned that Yogi Berra's real name was "Larry." Does anyone remember Ralph Kiner or Johnny Van Dor Meer? Does anyone know who this is? This next item will be more familiar to you. Does anyone still have a record player that can play 45's? Do you remember Glen Miller and his orchestra? And for military history buffs, here is a glass paperweight of Admiral Dewey. "Remember the Maine!" And for the kids and other young at heart, some tiny porcelain dogs. And a tiny elephant. Are you thirsty? Sorry. This Coke bottle isn't real. It's only about 2 inches tall. And then my Mom had a couple of card games when she was a child. This one, I don't have a clue what it is. Maybe you know who these people are. But this one is a game that helps you learn famous authors and their writings. This limited edition Eagle Belt Buckle has never been worn. It's in the original box with a certificate of authenticity. Antique game pieces, anyone? This next thing is cool. I

think this was my dad's. It's a map measure, with a little wheel on the bottom. Here's one of Grandma's pretty pins. But she had even more dishes than jewelry! This is a small, decorative plate. She had crystal. She had many adorable teacups and saucers that she used when company came to play bridge or pinochle. Everybody got a different cup, so you always knew which one was yours.

Finally, I began to unwrap my grandmother's dishes-a complete setting for 12, with all the additional platters, bowls, etc. I didn't know where to put them all--and they were so pretty, with their gold trim and delicate flowers. So I decided to set my dining room table. Just for fun, can anyone see where Melvyn is hiding? Then Jim walked in and asked, "What are you doing with all those? Why did you unwrap them?" I hadn't planned on keeping any of the things my parents had brought. (There's Melvyn!) But as I unwrapped the dishes, I remembered the suppers our family ate at Grandma and Pop Pop's house. She was a good cook and always had a crowd of her friends and other relatives stop in when we would come for a visit. After supper, I used to help her wash the dishes by hand. She didn't have a dishwasher. And even if she did, those dishes with their gold trim are probably not dishwasher safe.

I guess I changed my mind about keeping the dishes because I thought, "What would Grandma think if I gave away her dishes because they are too fragile--and we might break them if we use them?" Recalling her generosity and kindness, I know she would be glad if we used them and enjoyed them at our gatherings of friends and family.

With my aging parents having to give up so many of their belongings when they moved to the retirement community, and my dad struggling

with health challenges, I am learning to put “things” into perspective. I am learning, again, the lesson of what really matters --and it’s not our belongings or accomplishments--it’s our family, friends, and faith-- knowing to whom we belong and our true purpose in life--serving God, loving people.

So much of this life is fragile, including life itself. As a pastor, visiting the sick and comforting those grieving the loss of loved ones, I am often reminded of the fragility of life here. But as Christians, we needn’t fear the future. Rather, we who are *imperishable* and *unsnatchable* should make the most of the days God has given us-- mending our broken relationships, listening for the Good Shepherd’s voice, seeking to obey, and sharing the hope of eternal life for all who trust in Him.

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Our gospel today opens with Jesus talking with the Pharisees about things that really matter--who Jesus is and the way to eternal life. It is the Feast of the Dedication--Hanukkah- when the shepherd readings from the Hebrew Scriptures were commonly read in the synagogue, readings such as Ezekiel 34:23, “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.” It’s “winter,” when the “cold winds sweep in from the east across the ... desert.” (Ray Brown, 405) Jesus is walking on the east portico of the Temple, the only portico “whose closed side would protect it from the east wind.”

The question of whether Jesus is the Messiah has come up again. In John 7:26, during the Festival of Booths, the people of Jerusalem were asking, “Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.” In John 7:31, many in the crowd believe in him and are saying, “When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?” But in 7:41-42, the people are divided, saying, “This is the Messiah,” or “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?” Now in chapter 10, the Pharisees demand, “How long will you keep us in suspense?” (Other translations say, “How long will you keep annoying us?”) “If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

Jesus says, “I have told you and you do not believe.” The reason is simple enough. “You do not believe,” Jesus says, “because you are **not my sheep.**” In contrast to the unbelief of the Pharisees, Christ describes his flock’s obedience and faithfulness. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” Imagine how his first audience is hearing this. Jesus is saying, “You do not believe in me *not because I am not a shepherd*, but because *you are not sheep.*” The problem is with them--not Jesus! Earlier in chapter 10, Jesus compares the Pharisees to thieves, bandits, and hired hands; now they are not among God’s chosen, even though they are descendants of Abraham; they are not among the sheep the Father has given to Jesus! It’s not surprising that after our passage ends at verse 30 -- “I and the Father are one”-- the Pharisees take up stones in verse 31 and prepare to stone Jesus for making himself God. But he eludes their grasp and crosses the Jordan--returning to

where John had baptized him. Many come to believe in him there.

The Pharisees were angered when they heard condemnation in the Good Shepherd's remarks--that they were not his sheep because they did not believe he was the Messiah. But there is only good news for those who are Christ's sheep--for those who believe on Him and have accepted His sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world. If you are worried, my friends, that you are not hearing God's voice when you seek the Lord, be reassured. Jesus promises in verse 27 that his sheep **will** hear God's voice! God will answer your prayers!

If you worry that God isn't intimately involved in your life, listen to verse 27 again: Christ's sheep **are known** by the Lord, the God who created you! And if you sometimes worry that you might unintentionally choose a wrong path, that you might make a mistake, hear this and be at peace: verse 27 also says that Christ's sheep **will follow** him! If our hearts' desire is to be pleasing to Him and obey, Christ **will** lead the way.

And as we read on in this passage, the promises just keep getting better. "I give them eternal life," Jesus says in verse 28. "And they shall never perish." Eternal life cannot be earned, my friends! It is only a gift. And it cannot be lost. If you are Christ's sheep, your salvation is secure. You cannot slip out of or be snatched from the Lord's grasp. With echoes from Isaiah 43 and 49, Christ says in verses 28 and 29, "No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand."

Fellow sheep, you are *imperishable* and *unsnatchable*. Make the most of the days God has given you. Mend your broken relationships. Listen for the Good Shepherd's voice. Seek to obey. And share the hope of

eternal life for all who trust in Him.

Let us pray.

Good Shepherd, we are your sheep, grateful for all you have done for us on the cross--taking our sins away. Thank you for holding us tightly in your grasp--for the protection and security of your hand. Thank you that we cannot lose the salvation that is your gracious gift. Help us, Lord, to listen for and hear your voice. Guide us to paths and pastures of righteousness. Lead us to be your faithful, joyful, obedient sheep, following in your footsteps, reaching out to people in need, sharing the good news of eternal life with words and acts of love with a world so desperately in need of a savior. In Christ we pray. Amen.