

Tell Us Plainly, Jesus!

John 10:22-30

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

April 17, 2016 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

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In the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In today's Gospel text what we find is not only the plain truth concerning Jesus, but also the truth about those who belong to Jesus. The plain truth concerning Jesus is that He is who He says He is. The plain truth concerning those who belong to Him is that they listen to His voice and follow Him. The truth, then, is really quite plain and simple. Christ's sheep who are called by the Gospel, enlightened with God's gifts, sanctified and kept in that one true faith by the power of the Holy Spirit hear the voice of their Good Shepherd and follow Him into the fertile pastures of heavenly grass that awaits all God's children at the end of their earthly sojourn toward heaven.

The world, on the other hand, is full of all kinds of doubts about Jesus. And though many have tried to understand and explain Jesus in their own terms, the fact of the matter is that this approach will always end in failure. Indeed, such was the case for the Jews in this text who had come to Jesus with a question: "How long will You keep us in suspense?" they asked, "If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." On the surface it appears they were actually interested in what Jesus had to say – but underneath it's even more clear they were simply fed up with His claims. They had no intention of believing in Him, and now they were planning to put an end to the matter once and for all. They had come to challenge Jesus publicly – to try and get Him to declare once and for all whether or not He was the Christ. If He told them, "No," then they could simply declare Him a fraud and discredit Him completely. And, if He answered, "Yes," they could stone Him as a blasphemer and an evil man. Either way, it wouldn't be long before they would be done with Jesus and the trouble He was creating wherever He went.

But that was before our Lord opened His mouth and answered them, saying: "I **did** tell you, but **you** do not believe." They had come demanding that Jesus answer them plainly, but they got more than they expected. They had come accusing Him

of not speaking plainly, yet what happened was that they exposed themselves as being unwilling to listen to the truth. By their own actions and behavior, they clearly revealed their evil intentions for all to see. Rather than wanting to learn the truth, they had actually been trying to bury the truth. They had heard Jesus speak on numerous occasions, and they already knew the answer to their question. Apparently finding out what Jesus meant by His words had not been the reason they came to Him. Indeed, it was becoming plainer and plainer that the reason they had come was in hopes of silencing both Him and the truth so that they could continue unchallenged in their unbelief!

But the truth **cannot** be silenced, can it? It **always** comes out in the end. In this case the only thing in doubt was whether or not these Jews would have the opportunity to do Jesus in. Their duplicity was made crystal clear when Jesus gave them the plain, simple answer they had demanded, saying: "The works I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep." The plain, simple, unambiguous answer had come to them not only through Jesus' words, but also by His works. The miracles they had all had seen Him do proclaimed Him to be the Christ. To be sure, these miracles spoke so loudly that nothing else the Jews could have said would have been able to overshadow them. **Everything** Jesus did, He did as the One who had been sent by the Father. In Word and deed there was **nothing** about Jesus that wasn't evidently plain to all. But yet, like today, many still refused to believe.

But the Jews weren't the only ones who were there that day. There were also many who had heard the words of Jesus and believed in Him – in contrast to the unbelievers who refused to hear Jesus because they were not of His sheepfold. He said of the believers that because they were His sheep they would hear His voice. He knew them, and they followed Him. So, Jesus is a total Stranger to unbelievers, but to those who belong to Him, He is no stranger at all. What a contrast be-

tween the demands of unbelief and the pleas of faith! Those who belong to Jesus hear His voice and follow Him – for faith never makes demands on the One who is believed, but only upon the one who hears. Faith makes only one demand – that the hearer believe what is heard. Faith embraces the truth and acknowledges it as that which must be listened to and followed. Those who obstinately refuse to believe demand more and more plain statements concerning Jesus, while those who believe cry out as Peter once did: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Those who belong to the Lord say: “Tell us, plainly, Jesus, that we might hear and follow.” And when they hear Jesus speak, they follow after His voice.

Jesus said: “My sheep hear My voice. I know them, and they follow Me.” The reason the sheep know their Master’s voice is because **He first knows them**. He cares for them and calls them by name. He gives them everything they need and they receive it gladly. Jesus knows you, dear Christian. He knows your needs. He provides for you. He comes to you and calls for you – and so here you are. You hear His voice and you follow Him. He calls out to you, saying: “Come to Me – you know what you’re supposed to do. You know where you’re supposed to be. Come into the fold of the sheep where it’s safe and secure – come to Me here in My Church where I will see to it that you are well fed and cared for.” Our Lord and Savior Jesus calls out to you **plainly**, and you come at the sound of His voice.

Sometimes, though, the Master speaks through those He sends in His Name – and yet His sheep still hear His voice. They hear His voice because they know that while the message might come through another, the voice still belongs to Jesus. That’s how it is with Christ and His sheep. His shepherds speak to them not on their own authority, or with their own voice, but with His authority and His voice. Christ’s Church responds to His voice when She hears Him speak. Christ’s people recognize when they’re being fed and cared for in the same way their Master feeds and cares for

them. So it is also with you. When you stand in the sheepfold and cry out for the voice of your Master, He’s the One you expect to hear. No one else’s voice will suffice to bring you the comfort you seek. Only the voice of Jesus will satisfy those lambs who belong to Him – who cry out for the plain Word of God’s Truth spoken from the mouth of their Good Shepherd, Jesus.

How blessed you are, dear Christian, that you are known by Jesus so intimately that you know His voice and follow Him. Truly this is His doing. Through Holy Baptism Your Good Shepherd has given you His Holy Spirit and the faith to trust in Him for all things. He has purchased and won you to be His own. He has caused you to listen to His voice. He knows you and calls out to you – and in faith you listen and follow. He gives you eternal life and keeps you safe through His Means of Grace – through words spoken into your ears, water poured over your head, and bread and wine consumed for the forgiveness of sins. As long as you remain in Him you can be sure no one will ever lead you astray or steal you away. No one can snatch you out of His hand!

Dear lambs of God, my encouragement to you this day – and indeed, every day – is that you continue to follow the Way Your Shepherd and Savior has so plainly spoken to you. When you follow in His way, God’s promise is that He will keep you eternally safe in every circumstance of life – yes, even in the face of death itself – which has forever been defeated in the wounds of Christ. There will never be **any** time when you need be in suspense concerning the truth about Jesus, for now He **has** spoken plainly – and His voice is the same today as it was so long ago when He walked this world in human vesture. Even today He comes speaking plainly with His words of life. As you respond to His voice, rest assured that what He says to you is true – and for your eternal good. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.