

GOD'S SHEEP CAN BE CERTAIN  
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

JOHN 10:22-30  
APR 17, 2016

<sup>22</sup> At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."

Text is not about politics but discussion is similar in some ways  
to political discussions we hear today  
because issues are how you can really know who person is  
and what to expect from him.  
Question Jesus is asked is like questions asked of politicians  
"Why can't we get a straight answer?"  
And part of reply is "well, it depends." How's that for straight?  
For example, when politician talks about  
economic equality does it mean economy in which  
everyone starts with equal opportunity to get ahead  
or in which everyone ends up with equal benefits.  
or does freedom of speech mean everyone,  
including corporations can spend as much as they want  
for their voice to be heard  
or everyone, regardless of resources,  
should be heard equally.  
or does freedom from discrimination mean  
you can't be forced to provide services or do things  
that conflict with your faith,  
or that you have the right to expect certain services  
no matter what your sexual behavior?  
Same is true of host of other issues being debated.  
So, in text, question about whether Jesus is the Christ  
depends partly on what they think is meant by the Christ.  
But the other part of the question is what to expect.  
Again, as with politicians, the real answer is  
not just what people claim to be

but how they talk and what they do.  
One can give plain bold answers but how they communicate,  
including what their actions say can tell different story.  
So, the questions asked and answered in text about Jesus  
are about who he really is and what we can expect.  
We too want to listen to the answer because...

WE MAY WONDER WHO WE CAN TRUST TO DELIVER  
WE WANDER UNLESS WE LISTEN TO THE SHEPHERD  
OUR WONDERFUL GOD IS CERTAIN TO SAVE US

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long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us  
plainly."

I don't think Spirit inspired writers of Bible to waste words.  
So, why does John bother to tell us this happened  
during Feast of Dedication in winter?  
St. Augustine comments it shows the hearts of these Jews  
are as cold as winter.  
I think it has more to do with Feast of Dedication... of temple  
Solomon's Colonnade, where the rabbis taught,  
was named after most powerful king of Israel  
who first built glorious temple.  
Feast of Dedication, also called Hanukah, is festival of lights  
and celebration of God's deliverance from Greeks  
who had desecrated temple, and of how God provided  
for oil of sacred lamps to miraculously keep burning.  
As Passover celebrated deliverance from Egypt  
to come back to the promised land and build temple.  
Later it was destroyed by Babylonians  
but they were delivered from them and rebuilt temple.  
Later they were delivered from destruction by Persians  
which led to celebration of Purim.  
But now that they were under domination of Romans,  
question behind their question about Jesus being Christ  
is will God provide a new deliverer, a Christ?  
Kings, priests and prophets, were anointed.  
Hebrew word for anointed is Messiah. Greek is Christ.

God had promised a Christ/Messiah/Anointed one.

They need a king to throw out the enemy.

They need a prophet to give direction and speak comfort.

They need a priest to draw near to God.

Many thought that Jesus was that Christ.

but others reject him because he is not the kind they expect.

The season of winter raises questions still today

that are also raised by difficult seasons in life:

Will the harsh conditions end, will we make it through,  
when will "spring" come again?

Do I have to live in the dark in life and go by feelings  
or can I have a confident sense of direction?

Will I feel the warmth of God's love? Do I have a deliverer?

We may feel like saying, like these Jews, why do I have to wait?

Why do you lift our hopes? Give us a plain, bold answer.

But their question is like asking "Who do you think you are?"  
"What are you doing!"

They don't really want answer because minds are made up.

Yet they are like someone asking where something is in a store  
while they are standing right in front of it but don't know it.

So Jesus does give them a bold answer and make bold claims.

#### WE WANDER UNLESS WE LISTEN TO THE SHEPHERD

<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

So, is Jesus avoiding giving a straight answer to the question?

He is answering it, in two ways, first clarifying what Christ is,  
and also by not just making claims but by showing it,  
doing the things that the Christ does.

He is the Christ because he is the shepherd his sheep follow.

There were many sheep and shepherds in Israel  
but each sheep knew its own shepherd's voice  
and followed only that shepherd.

That one was not just a shepherd but the shepherd.

Jesus is not just another earthly king who controlled with orders  
and fought with armies

but the king who does miracles by his word  
because what he says happens

and who wins the victory in the spiritual battle with Satan.

Jesus is not just another prophet telling us what we should do  
and predicting what God will do.

but is the prophet who predicted his death & resurrection  
and himself fulfills for us all that God has said.

Jesus is not just another priest who keeps on sacrificing  
but the final priest who's sacrifice of himself  
pays for all of our sins in full.

So the question is not just whether he is a Christ  
but if he is the Christ, that is our Christ: king we follow,  
prophet we believe, priest in whom we trust.

that is, if he is our shepherd, who's voice we listen to  
or one we ignore because we are not his flock.

So Jesus' straight answer is only understood  
by those who are going straight, not wandering off.

In this world, people are constantly looking for  
whatever they can get for themselves.

People of the world don't want to listen to anyone  
but want to do their own thing & make final decision.

People of this world aren't sure if is anything after death  
or whether they are sure to get there.

But the real question is not whether God has power to provide  
or whether what he says is true, that is beyond question,  
but question is whether we believe in Jesus.

It is Jesus himself who leads us to answer this question  
by what he says and does.

He is our shepherd who keeps calling us with his word.

He calls us by name in our baptisms.

Being called by name makes us part of his family.

He continually feeds us in Lord's Supper to strengthen faith.

He says to us by his words and actions, I am your Christ,

I am your shepherd, follow me, because...

## OUR WONDERFUL GOD IS CERTAIN TO SAVE US

<sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."

When our shepherd says listen to my voice, follow me,

he is like parent saying to child before crossing  
dangerous street: take my hand.

But what if child stumbles or is afraid and lets go?

Child's little hand is not just holding to parent,  
But parent's big hand wrapped around child's still holds on.  
Jesus is saying we can be confident he will keep holding to us.  
One could deliberately jerk their hand away & reject faith,  
but we need not fear what may happen to us.  
Jesus promises to give life that never perishes.  
We hear this reading during the Easter season because  
his resurrection is the sign that this is true.  
He can do this for us because he himself is still alive.  
And he can say this because he is God, one with the Father.  
Both Jesus & the Father are of one mind toward us.  
So they hold on to both of our hands  
guaranteeing both spiritual and physical life.  
In first reading, when Paul says goodbye to church at Miletus.  
He knows fierce wolves will attack the flock, false teachers,  
deceptive temptations of devil to make us stumble,  
then he turns around with accusations  
to make us doubt God's love and our salvation.  
But Paul confidently commends them to God  
& word of his grace, his promise to forgive & restore us.  
We too, can trust God to preserve our spiritual life  
through his word of grace.  
Meanwhile, Paul knows he is facing physical attack & death  
but he is still confident, knowing he is in God's hands  
and God can preserve his physical life, which he does.  
Our lives are in God's hands too and he takes care of us.  
He who is greater than all can always help us.  
But what about when this life does come to an end?  
When Jesus says eternal life, he means eternal.  
Second reading gives picture of those Jesus has delivered  
from every trouble and restored to physical life.  
The Good Shepherd guides his flock from all nations  
all the way to heaven and springs of living water  
where finally we are delivered from all evil.

This is Jesus' bold answer that gives us real hope & certainty.  
WE MAY WONDER WHO WE CAN TRUST TO DELIVER  
Jesus shows by words and deeds that he is the Christ.  
WE WANDER UNLESS WE LISTEN TO THE SHEPHERD  
but Jesus knows us and calls us to follow him.  
OUR WONDERFUL GOD IS CERTAIN TO SAVE US  
by giving & preserving physical, spiritual and eternal life.