

4th Sunday of Easter April 25th

NIV John 10:22-30 Lord of All, Savior of all, Jesus Christ, Thank you for overcoming our sinful foolishness and stubbornness. On our own we never would have found a way through sin, death and hell. Thank you for leading us to faith by your powerful Word. Help us today to be so filled with your strength and your love that we might use your Word to lead others to believe in you and follow your voice to safety now and forever into heaven.

Introduction: Being a leader is not an easy thing. I love to take my family on outdoor adventures. Whether it is hunting with Nathanael in the Arctic Circle or the kids and I on a new mountain bike trail, I enjoy leading them safely through it and making it an enjoyable adventure. Every time though there is a tension in my mind, leading the way or staying back. If I'm out in front showing them the way, I am sure I will give them the easiest and safest path, but I'm unable to help them in the back and make sure they are following. And if I hang back with them and make certain they are all safe, I am not able to see what's coming up ahead and give them the best possible route to take for fun and safety Which one will I choose? When it comes to our spiritual adventure through life, escaping the dangers of sin, death and the power of the devil, our Lord Jesus Christ has lead the way by defeating them all by His death on the cross for us and His resurrection from the dead for us – the lamb of God. But he also as our one and only Great Shepherd walks step in step with us keeping us close to him and filling all our needs, guaranteeing our safety. He is our lamb and our shepherd, the world's greatest leader.

Stay close! Stay safe as the Sheep of the One and Only Good Shepherd!

Part 1) Follow the familiar voice of your Savior

Part 2) Use your unfair advantage everyday

Part 1) Follow the familiar voice of your Savior

Some Jews cornered Jesus and asked him, “For the love of our souls, please tell us plainly, Are you the Messiah, the chosen one?”

At first reading their question sounds like a perfectly innocent request and one that Jesus would welcome and answer pleasantly. When we look back at what has just taken place in Jerusalem over the past months and read what Jesus has already told them and then hear Jesus' pointed and specific answer, we get quite A DIFFERENT understanding of these Jews, their question and their heart.

Let's focus in on what Jesus has done publicly in Jerusalem and publicly said to the Jews in Jerusalem. Jesus has already fed the 5,000 with one lunch box of food. And then 2 months before our text Jesus had restored sight to a man born blind! At that time and many times before Jesus clearly, plainly, stated words like these found in John's gospel: NIV John 7:37 ...Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Sadly, the question was not asked to find comfort, help and safety for troubled sinners. Jesus tells them, "I did tell you, but you did not believe." The question was asked to trap Jesus into condemning himself or so they thought. If Jesus would say he was the Messiah, than they had grounds to stone him for the crime of blasphemy, claiming you are God.

How sad it is to hear Jesus words to them, "...you do not believe because you are NOT my sheep." When all the enemies of humanity come knocking on our door in life, it seems everyone turns to Psalm 23 "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want" But in order for these passages of the Lord to bring us comfort, peace, safety and hope, we need to know if we are His Sheep. Well...are you? Are you one of the sheep of his pasture? Jesus equates believing in him as being one of his sheep.

The Jews of Jerusalem, saw Jesus restore sight to the blind and maybe even some of them ate the food Jesus himself prepared for a crowd of 5,000 not to mention women and children. Yet they weren't his sheep, his believers. Many of the Jews heard Jesus clearly, plainly tell them, that he was sent by God to lay down his life for sinners and that whoever believed in him would have eternal life. Yet they weren't his sheep, his believers.

What went wrong? Where is the short circuit? Where is the disconnect between the people and believing in Jesus? It's not on Jesus side – he performed those miraculous signs that no one but God himself

could perform that pointed to him as the Son of God. It's not on Jesus side – he clearly plainly told them his identity and his mission sent by the Father to lay down his life and pick it up again. The blame falls on the sinful people who refused the plain evidence they had before their eyes and ringing in their ears. They were foolish to miss out on such a great leader, their Savior.

Before we are too harsh on them, we need to ask ourselves the same question. Do we believe? Are we his sheep? Then if we answer yes I do believe then how do you explain the fact that we don't follow our Shepherd's voice? How do you explain the fact that at times we ignore His voice, go our own path and do our own thing?

Jesus himself tells us that His sheep, his believers, listen to the voice of their shepherd. He knows them and they follow him.

The Jews should have believed in Jesus as their savior and Lord. But they didn't; their own minds, their own hearts, their sinful wants and desires steered them clear of Jesus and off on their own to find peace, comfort joy and happiness. We are believers. Yet we often act like unbelievers and follow the voice of our own sinful mind and sinful heart, running off away from the voice of Jesus and searching for happiness and satisfaction away from Jesus, the lamb sacrificed for us and the Son of God who was raised from the dead for us.

So which is it are we His sheep or not? Maybe this picture will help. I had a friend of mine who had a problem drinking too much and then he would drive home. I heard through the grapevine of his problem and encouraged people to talk to him about it. When I witnessed it first hand, I met with him. After a couple minutes of denial, He was devastated that I found out, that his children new and that his church family new. Was he a sheep of Jesus' flock? But he ran off on his own, he didn't listen to the voice of His shepherd, he didn't trust in Jesus' direction for his safety, comfort, joy and happiness? Someone who is drunk and drives can't be a sheep of God's family can he? He can't be a believer, can he?

He can and he was and he still is. Believing in Jesus and listening to his voice in more than obedience to His commands. It is a loving Father-Son, Father – daughter relationship. He was a sheep and is a sheep today because he trusts his heavenly father for forgiveness. He trusts in the lamb who was slain for his sins. He trusts the voice of His Savior that says, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone." Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

My children are not my children because they act like my children. I do not love and protect my children because they listen to my voice and obey what I command. So too, the Lord knows us. He died for us as the Lamb of God. He rose from the dead for us as our Savior and Lord. His Sheep believe in his Son as their Savior from Sin and Lord over all. That is a familiar voice we are always welcome to hear.

Part 2) Use your unfair advantage everyday

What an unfair advantage for us over everyone else! It's no contest. AS the sheep of God's pasture, we have such tremendous advantages it blows every human philosophy and self help wisdom out of this world. Jesus counts for us the two most tremendous advantages this world has ever seen for this life:

128 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

It is really not fair for our enemies, is it? Think for a moment trying to live your life without a clear sense of the right way or the wrong way. I know us men have a bad habit of putting things together without reading the directions, but when it comes to life and death, the safety of your loved ones, what man would be so stubborn and foolish to ignore a guide and a map.

In God's great wisdom he put a man in my path south, who had been a Coyote. A Coyote is a guide that knows the way across the Mexican border into the United States, away from the beaten path. They know the way, so people trying for a new and better life paid him to lead them through the rough and barren desert to freedom. He had left his life of illegal trafficking behind him by the time I met him. He told me he did it to gain enough money to care for his family and bring them to the US as well. In a case, I'll never forget when we talked about Jesus being the way to eternal life. He truly wanted to live for Jesus because he had been shown the way to heaven. He wanted to show the way to his wife, his children and his neighbors and all his old friends. He talked about relief. In the past he was always afraid – every phone call, every door knock. Knowing the way to heaven and peace through Jesus our Great Shepherd is relief not just for my old Coyote friend but also for us today.

How sad would it be if we decided not to use that way? How foolish would we be to know the way and then to live like we were lost. You and I have the tremendous advantage of knowing the way to heaven and not just for when we die, but today and everyday. Jesus tells us that never, ever will anyone or anything snatch us from his safety in his flock. It just can't happen on Jesus watch.

He is faithful to His promises. He is not a man that lies or even stutters. What he says he accomplished no matter what. He is all powerful. Nothing stands in his way. Nothing can deter his plans. Nothing changes his plans. He is all loving. And the list goes on and on and on. A mighty fortress is our God a trusty shield and weapon! He helps us free in every need! Stay close! Stay safe as the sheep of the One and Only Good Shepherd. Don't wander to far away from his voice that your faith in God's love would dwindle or God forbid to leave you altogether. God is faithful and ever loving. Live with the peace of mind that you are his sheep and no one and no thing can ever snatch you from His loving hands. Amen.