

Jesus' Sheep

John 10:22-30

They had Jesus surrounded. Jesus was in the temple in Solomon's porch. It was more protected from the weather and cold and so it was the place to be at the feast of Hanukkah in late December. Jesus' enemies had been fighting against a growing consensus that Jesus might be the Christ. All of the evidence favored such a conclusion but it was their determined position that Jesus could not be the Christ. Such a thought was unthinkable for them. Jesus was to them like a stray donkey or a wild bull breeding chaos and rebellion. I was going to say that He was like a loose canon or a bull in a china shop but these were not metaphors of the 1st century in which they lived so, a stray donkey or a wild bull will have to do.

So they had Him surrounded. It was a moment of opportunity. They asked the big question, the one everyone had been asking, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly..." There are things that you can only tell your friends because anyone who is not your friend would use the information against you. It is not that you are guilty of anything but the information is the kind that can be made to make you look bad by someone who has the desire to do so.

Jesus had spoken clearly to friends about who He was. When the woman at the well said, "I know that Messiah is coming, when He comes He will tell us all things." Jesus answered, "I who speak to you am He." When Jesus said to the blind man, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The blind man said, "Who is He Lord that I may believe in Him?" Then Jesus replied, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." The woman at the well's response was to go into her village and tell everyone, "Come see a man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" The blind man's response was "Lord, I believe!" and he worshipped Him.

Speaking openly about being the Messiah was language to be used only with friends. The title had political overtones that could be twisted to suggest the fomenting of rebellion against Rome. If Jesus had said that He was the Messiah to

these conspirators then they would have run immediately to the Romans and accused Jesus of declaring Himself to be king. The term had theological overtones and the temple leaders and the people would have imposed their Messianic expectations upon Jesus, rather than allowing Him to define Himself. In the hands of His enemies, the term was too loaded. Jesus could not trust them with an answer because He knew that they intended to use it to blow Him up, sorry, too modern a metaphor again, they intended to use it to steal His sheep.

So, how do you respond in such a situation? If you don't answer a direct question with a direct answer, you look evasive. To be evasive is to appear to be dishonest, as if you have something to hide. What Jesus did is He effectively said that He couldn't talk to them about the question since they were not His friends. And, changing the subject, let Me tell you what my friends are like and what it is like to be My friend.

Let me share Bruner's translation of vv, 27,28, "My very special sheep are [doing three things] listening to My voice, and I am getting to know them experientially [they are experiencing Me] and they are walking around with Me. And I am giving them, in turn, [three realities] deep, lasting life, and they will never perish, and no one will ever snatch these people out of My grip."

He then concludes about these people:

- 1) They are the people who first and most fundamentally listen to Jesus' voice.
- 2) They are the people whom Jesus is getting to know, experientially.
- 3) They are the people who are starting to walk with and to follow Jesus.
- 4) They are the people, therefore, who are receiving deep lasting life from Jesus.
- 5) They are the people who are given the special assurance of an indefectible security.
- 6) They are the people (He repeats for emphasis) who are forever safe in Jesus' grip.

In this description of His friends there is an implied invitation... If there is a ground of friendship that is so fertile, so rich, and so rewarding, wouldn't you like to live there? As He was surrounded, Jesus was saying to these who were out to get Him, I know that you're not My friends but this does not mean that you can't be My friends, and if you were to become My friends, how rich your lives could be...

The trick here is that these opponents of Jesus thought that they were close to God. They were temple authorities. They were the administrators of God's law. They saw themselves as the authority as to who and what God was like. But, they were not Jesus' friends and Jesus would soon say, "I and the Father are one." By definition, you cannot be close to the Father and reject the Son. But this was their exact position.

When the Bible speaks of assurance, it also defines who is qualified to feel so assured. Here, Jesus promises that His friends (His sheep) will never perish, and no one shall ever snatch these people out of My grip. But His sheep are known by the fact that they listen to His voice, they are getting to know Him experientially and they are walking around with Him all the time.

Measure the quality of your relationship with the Lord. Do you listen to His voice? Listening to His voice means that you want to know what He has to say. Often, we take pains to avoid hearing what our boss or teacher or husband or wife or even what Jesus would say about a matter that we've already made up our minds about. Listening to His voice means that you are always ready to go to Him so that you can hear what He wants to say to you. It means that you view His word as trustworthy and good. He will never turn you away from your own best interests. Listening means that you only need to hear from Him to be absolutely positive about what you want to do. What He says!

The second description is of the sheep who gets to know and becomes known by the shepherd. This is the back and forth of relationship. When I am becoming known then I am also getting to know. This is the experience of mutual response. Does your spouse love coffee or tea? When does your spouse most enjoy his or her coffee or tea? Do you enjoy serving it up at just the right moment? What does your spouse know just as well about you? Knowing and becoming known...

Sometimes we get in trouble men, when we fail to know what our wives want. It's like they are expecting us to read their minds and always know what they are thinking. A woman might say that if you really knew me then you would know what I am thinking. But in respect to this, I want (on this Sunday before Valentine's Day) to plead for patience from our women. Men, are naturally obtuse and can only become sensitive to your thoughts and needs after years of rigorous training. Don't give up. Keep on patiently working with Your husband. Explain the obvious over and over when necessary. Eventually, he will start to get it. Knowing and becoming known.

So talk to the Lord. Tell Him what you think. He knows anyway so you might as well open up. Then, listen to Him. Listen for Him. He will introduce thoughts meant to help and direct you. You will get used to what He is like. You can almost hear Him before He says it. When you make yourself known to Him, He also shares Himself with you.

Finally, Bruner translates, "and they are walking around with Me." This is a following that has a focus on reciprocity. Walking around with Him suggests that He is deciding where to walk and then we are deciding to be there also. Wherever he is where we learn to want to be. You cannot miss out when you are with Him. If you say to your friend, Hey, you missed the party last night. And he answers, I just wanted to stay home and watch the game. Does he feel as if he missed out? No, he was doing what he wanted to do. Being with Jesus is better than anything else. You can never miss out when you are with Him

And to those friends (sheep) who listen to His voice, are learning to know Him and becoming known and who prefer to walk around with Him all the time - I will give them deep and lasting life, they will never perish and no one will ever snatch these people out of my grip.