



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Easter 4
May 8, 2022

Tell Us Plainly, Jesus! **John 10:22-30**

²² At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; ²³ it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these bear witness of Me. ²⁶ “But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. ²⁷ “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ “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. ³⁰ “I and the Father are one.”

In today’s Gospel we learn the plain truth about Jesus and those who belong to Him. The truth about Jesus is that He is who He says He is; the truth about those who belong to Him is that they listen to Him and follow Him. This truth is plain and simple, even though people often think of it as being complicated. What makes such a seemingly complicated issue so simple? Our text will explain.

The Jews in our text were confused. They were trying to understand Jesus on their own terms. This is often the case with the unbelieving world, where many have tried to do just what the Jews were doing: trying to squeeze Jesus into their own mold. But this always ends in failure. The Jews came to Jesus, asking, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” They were frustrated with Jesus and His claims to be the Messiah. They had already determined not to believe in Him because they were not part of His flock. And now they were scheming to put the matter to rest.

What fueled their fire, in part, was that the multitudes were coming to Jesus, putting their faith in Him. A rift was developing, therefore, between those who believed in Jesus and those who didn’t. To the Jewish leadership, this was intolerable; it had to end. So, they decided to come to Jesus and have it out, once and for all. They would cut to the chase. Was Jesus claiming to be the Messiah, the Christ, or wasn’t He? If He said “No,” they would declare Him to be a fraud and discredit Him. If He said “Yes,” they would stone Him as a blasphemer. Either way, they were finally going to be rid of Him . . . or so they thought.

Jesus answered their challenge just as forthrightly: “I told you, and you do not believe.” They demanded that Jesus answer them plainly, and, well, they got what they asked for . . . and more. And it did not go well for them. When confronted with the truth, unbelief always stands judged. These unbelieving Jews accused Jesus of not speaking plainly, thereby subjugating themselves under the judgment of God for refusing to hear the



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truth. For, in doing this, their dishonesty and evil intentions were exposed. Rather than trying to learn the truth, they were actually trying to bury it. They'd heard what Jesus said and they knew what He meant. This was the very reason they'd come to Him with this challenge. They didn't *like* what He said, and therefore wanted to silence both Him and the truth so that they could continue unruffled in their unbelief.

But, note this well: Truth cannot be suppressed forever; it *always* comes out in the end. "How long will you keep us in suspense?" the Jews demanded. What a farce! They didn't want the truth. There was no uncertainty as to who Jesus was. Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus at night and made this astonishing admission: "We know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). So, these liars weren't searching for the truth, they were looking for an opportunity to trash His reputation and be finished with Him. But hypocrites are always exposed in the end, and these Jews certainly were when Jesus gave them the plain answer they had demanded.

But, that's not all. He continued: "The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe, because you are not part of my flock." In addition to it being Mother's Day today is also known as Shepherd Sunday. And, while we don't have in this reading cycle the first part of this chapter from John in which Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd, we do have in our text the continuation of that thought, where Jesus speaks about His sheep – who they are and who they are not. Jesus' sheep believe in Him not only because of what He *says*, but also because of what He *does*. The miracles He performed clearly proclaimed Him to be the Christ, the One who had come in the Name of the Lord. "The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me," He said. Everything He did, He did as the One sent by the Father and proved that what He said about Himself was true. But, what He said about the Jews was also true: they did not believe.

What a contrast to these unbelieving Jews were those who heard Jesus and believed in Him. Jesus declared, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Jesus is a stranger to unbelievers, so they don't listen to Him. But to those who are His, Jesus is no stranger at all. There's a vast difference between the demands of unbelief and the pleas of faith. Those who belong to Christ plainly hear His voice and follow Him.

You see, faith doesn't make demands on the One it believes in; it makes its demands on the ones who listen. Faith demands that the hearers believe what they hear. Faith embraces the truth and acknowledges that it must be listened to and followed. Those who don't believe demand plain statements of who Jesus is; those who believe cry out as Peter 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 may hear and follow." And when they hear Him, they follow His voice.

When I was on vicarage, a family in the church kept sheep. I saw first hand what He means, when Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow



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me.” The family who owned the sheep spent a lot of time with them. Whenever they walked into the barn, all the sheep would drift over to see them. They would merely speak to them and the sheep would move. They could handle them, doctor them, shear them, and the sheep never balked or complained. The sheep knew who their caregivers were, simply by the sound of their voice.

There were times when the family needed help – usually with lambing or shearing – and they would ask other church members to lend a hand. What the family did with no trouble at all, became a rodeo for the others! The sheep didn’t know them, nor did they trust them. In short, they wanted no part of them. Oh, the helpers would get the job done, but the whole time the sheep would be bellowing and complaining, as if they were being killed.

Jesus said: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” The reason sheep know the sound of their Master’s voice is because He knows *them*. He regularly cares for them and calls them by name. He gives them what they need and they receive it from Him. Jesus knows you, beloved. He knows your needs. He provides for you. He comes to you and calls you, and here you are. You hear His voice and listen to Him and follow Him. He says to you: “Come on, now. You know what you need to do. You know where you need to be. Come into the fold where it’s safe and where you can be fed and cared for.” His call is very plain, so you come.

Sometimes, the Master speaks to us through those He sends in His Name. Often this is through pastors or teachers or even friends. Many times, the very first person to speak to us with the voice of Christ is our mother. Thank God for faithful mothers who speak with the voice of Jesus, even to their unborn children, so that when the children are older, they’ll recognize Christ’s voice when they hear it from someone else. They’ll hear Him and follow Him, because, even though the message is coming through another, it’s still His voice.

After the helpers in my vicarage church spent some time with the sheep, they would eventually begin to react differently. They were no longer skittish or nervous around them. They didn’t move away when they came into the barn. Once in a while, they could even shear them without having them bawling the whole time. The sheep learned that these helpers would treat them like the family treated them and so the helpers no longer seemed like strangers.

So it is with Christ and His sheep. His shepherds speak to them, not with their own voice, but with His. And Christ’s Church responds to His voice when they hear it. His people recognize when they’re being fed and cared for in the same way that their Master feeds and cares for them. So it is with you and Your Lord Jesus. You stand in the pen and cry out to your Master. And you expect to hear only Jesus in the Church. No one else’s voice will suffice for your comfort and well-being; only the voice of Jesus will satisfy you. So you cry out: “Tell us plainly, Jesus.” And He does.

How blessed you are, dear friends, to be known by Jesus so intimately that you know His voice and follow Him. This truly is His doing. He’s given you His Spirit and the



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faith to trust in Him. He's purchased you with His blood. He's caused you to listen to His voice. He knows you and calls you as His own . . . and in faith you follow Him. He's given you eternal life and keeps you safe through His means of grace. No one can snatch you out of His hand. As long as you remain in Him, as long as you continue to trust and follow Him, no one can lead you astray or steal you away.

Dear fellow sheep, continue in the Lord. Listen attentively to Him as He speaks to you in His Word. Listen to Him and follow His voice as He leads you to springs of living water. You need never be in suspense about the truth. Oh, it may seem complicated at first, but it's really not. He's spoken plainly, and His voice is the same today as it was in the days of our text. If you're a part of His flock, dear brother, dear sister, you will listen to His voice. And, as you respond to His voice, that is to say, if you follow Him, you will rest assured that what He says to you is true and that His truth is for your eternal good. Beloved, stay safe in His grace and true faith, now and forever. In the Name of the Father and of the Son † and of the Holy Spirit. Amen