

The Fourth Sunday of Easter, May 8, 2022

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

The Plain-Spoken Shepherd

John 10:22–30

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

Jesus said: **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 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. I and the Father are one”** (vv 27–30).

They surrounded Jesus in the temple and asked:

“How long will You keep us in suspense?

If You are the Christ, tell us plainly” (v 24).

The air is thick, tense.

3.

Tell them plainly? *Plainly?*

Like the time He’d said,

“Before Abraham was, I AM!” (John 8:58)

Claiming preexistence!

Taking the Divine Name for Himself!

And they wanted to stone Him to death for that.

Seems pretty plain to me

—His statement *and* their response.

Or that other time, right after feeding the five thousand,

when they wanted to make Him a bread king and He said,

“I am the bread that came down from heaven. . . .

The bread I’ll give for the life of the world is My flesh” (John 6:41, 51)

They called that a “hard saying.”

Not hard to understand.

Just hard to believe.

So, **many turned back** from His plain words

and no longer walked with Him (John 6:66).

“I told you,” Jesus said, **“and you don’t believe”** (v 25).

He’s right.

He did tell—tell plainly—and still many don’t believe.

He told in other ways, too.

“The works that I do in My Father’s name bear witness about Me” (v 25).

What works?

There was a man lame for thirty-eight years—

thirty-eight years!

Waiting for a miracle, for an angel, for something, for anything.

Then Jesus told him to take up his mat and walk.

And he did.

He got up, rolled up the mat, walked right over to the Jewish leaders,
and told them, “Jesus healed me.”

There was another man, blind from birth.

It wasn’t that his parents had sinned.

It wasn’t that he’d sinned.

But that the works of God might be displayed in him (John 9:3).

A little spit and a little mud on the eyes, a little wash in the pool,

Jesus made new eyes that see.

The man born blind saw.

He saw that Jesus came from God.

He even told the Pharisees.

Did they believe?

In their blindness, **they cast him out** (John 9:34).

The Jewish leaders didn’t believe that Jesus is the Christ.

“You don’t believe,” Jesus said, **“because you aren’t part of My flock”** (v 26).

But the man who’d been lame did believe.

And the man who’d been blind also believed.

They believed.

They listened.

They followed.

They belonged to His flock.

They were His sheep.

2.

We also want plain talk from Jesus.
We don't want to be kept in suspense.
But are we ready to hear Him?
Will we listen to Him?
Will we believe what He says?

Sometimes we have a way of making Scripture
more complicated than it really is.
I know because I do it, too.
What He says is plain,
but we make it nuanced, qualified, convoluted.

Instead of listening to what *He* has to say,
we want answers to *our* questions.
We try to make God's Word fit with *our* beliefs.
We twist it to rationalize *our* actions.
We want to be the shepherd and for Jesus to be the sheep,
for Him to follow us.

Just consider:
What does God's Word say about life? Abortion?
About male and female, marriage, sex, motherhood, homosexuality?
About the love of money?
The lust for power?
The desire to be approved by others?
About how we are to love God and our neighbors?

"Will, it's complicated," we say.

No, actually, it isn't.
But I will grant this:
life is complicated—
often complicated by what we've said and done.
Complicated by the messes we've made.
But God's Word is clear.
His commandments are plain.

St. Paul goes so far as to say in Romans

that we human beings are **without excuse** before God (Rom 1:20).

**For what can be known about God is *plain* to them,
because God has shown it to them.**

For His invisible attributes—

His eternal power and divine nature—

**have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world,
in the things that have been made (Rom 1:19–20).**

In other words, plainly there *is* a God.

An *almighty* God.

An almighty God who *created* the heavens and the earth.

Who made you and all creatures,

gave you your body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members,
your reason and all your senses,
and still takes care of them.

That's what's plain: You are made by God.

He didn't make your sin,

but He made your human nature.

And there's another thing to tell you plainly:

God so loved you that He gave His only Son,

So that believing in Him you would not perish but have eternal life.

As Jesus said:

"I am the Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . .

For this reason the Father loves Me,

because I lay down My life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from Me,

but I lay it down of My own accord.

I have authority to lay it down,

and I have authority to take it up again.

This charge I've received from My Father" (John 10:11, 17–18).

And another plain thing for this Good Shepherd Sunday:

Martin Luther said,

"Thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the Church is—
the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.
For the children pray,

'I believe in one holy Christian Church.' . . .

This holiness [comes] from God's Word and true faith" (SA III, XII, 2–3).

Plainly, there is a flock of God purchased by the blood of Christ, the Church.

So, hold fast to these *plain* things:

God created you.

The commandments show you your sin.

Jesus died and rose for you.

You belong to His flock.

1.

What Jesus said and did was enough for the lame man and the blind man.

It's enough for us.

We don't need to wait for more evidence, for more words, for another work.

Leap up and follow Jesus!

Open your eyes and see clearly who He is!

Don't let unbelief slow you down or cloud your sight.

And then hear the final, beautiful promises of Jesus.

Plain promises that Jesus makes for plain sheep like us.

"My sheep hear My voice," Jesus says,

"and I know them.

And they follow Me.

I give them eternal life" (vv 27–28).

He states the plain facts about His sheep.

For their part,

they hear Him; they follow Him.

Just like we heard about Simon Peter and St. Paul last Sunday.

For His part, these are the facts:

He knows His sheep.

He gives them eternal life.

And more:

"They will never perish.

No one will snatch them out of My hand" (v 28).

Here He says nothing about the part of the sheep.

It's all promise—the second promise even clearer than the first.

What Jesus promises is this:

He is and will be a faithful Good Shepherd.

We have His assurance.

His guarantee.

He is powerful to save His sheep *and* to hold on to His sheep.

So, we sheep are secure in Him.

A promise is only as good as the one who makes it.
Jesus promise is as good as His death and resurrection.
He laid down His life and took it up again
to secure this promise.

It's all for our comfort.
His words lead no one to despair.
Just as His words lead no one to embrace or continue in sin.

So, dear friends, poor sinners, weary souls,
don't turn back into yourselves.
Don't listen to or follow your own hearts.
Listen to Him.
Follow Him.

For, as He tells us plainly,
I know you.
I give you eternal life.
You will never perish.
No one will snatch you out of My hand.

Why not?
Because **"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.
I and the Father are One"** (vv 29–30).

And for that, the Jewish leaders **picked up stones again to stone Him.**
But the lame, the blind, and all us plain sheep—
We follow our risen, plain-spoken Shepherd into eternal life.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ
Jesus.

Phil 4:7