
4TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

APRIL 21, 2013

THE LORD'S PORTION IS HIS PEOPLE

Pastor Jim Dunn

John 10:22-30

I and the Father Are One

22 At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, **23** and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. **24** 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." **25** 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, **26** but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. **27** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. **28** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will 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."

On November 16, 1940, workers at the Con Edison building in New York found a homemade pipe bomb. Attached was a note: "Con Edison crooks, this is for you." The next year a second bomb was found a few blocks from the Con Edison headquarters. A few months later the New York police received a note promising "to bring Con Edison to justice – they will pay for their dastardly deeds." Sixteen notes followed between 1941 and 1946, all written in precise block letters and using the words "dastardly deeds." In 1950, a third bomb was found in Grand Central Station. A fourth bomb exploded at the New York Public Library. A fifth one exploded at Grand Central Station. In 1954, yet another bomb went off in Radio City Music Hall, sending shrapnel through the audience. The bomber struck 6 more times in 1955.

Desperate, the police brought the case to a criminal profiler, a psychiatrist who had done counter-espionage work for the FBI. He suggested that the bomber had at one time worked for Con Edison. The precise writing style of his notes indicated that the bomber was orderly, cautious, had a good work record. The kind of words he used indicated some degree of education. But who still used the expression “dastardly deeds”? The bomber had to be a traditionalist. The way he formed his “W”s suggested that he was unmarried, living with a mother figure. The bomber was arrested one month later, because the profiler was able to provide police with a profile of the bomber. The profiler was able to think his way into the mind of the criminal.

Now, if someone would think his way into the mind of a Christian, what kind of profile would he come up with? Hopefully, in your case and mine, he would come up with this one: *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me.”*

“My sheep.” A Christian belongs to Jesus. That should come across from our words. That should come across in our attitude. Nothing is more important to the Christian than giving a faithful witness to the love of Christ in word and attitude.

“My sheep **hear My voice.**” Others may listen to the bright promises of socialism or communism or capitalism. But the Christian listens to the promises in God's Word.

“I know them, and **they follow Me.**” This should be the easiest part for a profiler. He should be able to identify us as those who forgive as Christ forgave, who give as Christ gave, never counting the cost; who serve without being self-serving, serving our family, serving others in our daily vocation; who are content whatever our circumstances.

This profile of the Christian, provided by Jesus, should make the profiler's job a lot simpler because most people don't fit that profile. Most people do not **follow** Jesus. Rather, they are **driven** by their circumstances. They are driven either to happiness or despair depending on their circumstances. They feel successful or unsuccessful, lucky or unlucky, happy or miserable depending on their circumstances. Because life's circumstances are often tragic, as we were reminded this week, people are often driven to despair, rage, fear, or pessimism.

These responses don't fit the profile of a Christian. We have not been called to follow Jesus only to be rattled by the wind of every circumstance. But when the wind blows hard against us or those we love, and we've cried out to the Lord but He's apparently asleep in the back of the boat, then we, too, can be driven to despair, rage, fear, pessimism, even distrust of God's promises.

"Don't you care, Lord, if we drown?" That's what we hear in our hearts, too, and not only in ours but also in the words of Psalm 22, written by David. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" So often, we quote these words as coming from Jesus' mouth on the cross. We forget that David said them first. Some of his psalms were based on specific circumstances in his life. But the experts won't say in what circumstances David wrote the despairing words of Psalm 22. Yet, they sound a lot like the words David said when he received news of his son's death. "O my son, Absalom, my son, my son." (2Samuel 19:4) Did David then write, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Even a child of God, like David, can be driven to speak words that don't fit the profile of a Christian. We all can be driven to speak words of despair and distrust of God. Words like "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? O my God, I cry out, but You do not answer."

Words that fit the style of someone else that mourned the loss of sons and daughters. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." (Matthew 23:37) These are the words of our Shepherd. He mourned His lost sheep. He grieved over His lost sons and daughters. Jesus revealed that unlike a profiler, He does not need to think His way into your mind. He knows how you feel. He's your shepherd. Jesus knows your grief, your tragedies, and what has broken your heart. He knows what has given you joy and what has brought you sorrow. He knows you. "My sheep hear My voice, and I **know** them." He knows you. He values you. You mean more to Him than anything else. You are His portion. "For the Lord's portion is His people." Deuteronomy 32:9.

Only this could have persuaded Him to enter your circumstances, to descend from heaven, to be born, and to walk through sorrow's valley the same as you, to experience the same private hells, and then go one step further. To experience hell, to be able to say in all truth without a bit of distrust, "God, You have forsaken Me" and then lay down His life for the sheep to redeem you, to gather you to Himself... for He is your shepherd!

He again went one step further. He rose again, so that by His death and resurrection He would put His brand upon you. No one to snatch you from His hand ever, not even death. This is His brand, His claim upon you as His sheep.

"**My** sheep," He says. **My** portion, He says to you. His brand upon you and upon everything you touch: your home, your possessions, your time, your work, your loved ones. They are not yours. They are His. As well as your burdens, your troubles, and your heartaches. He claims you for His own so that you may give Him your burdens, your troubles, and your heartaches.

He claims you as His own for eternal life so you can give Him your renewed trust. Trusting that He is always on the move. In your life and in the lives of those you love. His moving and maneuverings may even be for the purpose of driving people back to Himself that all of us may belong to Him, hear His voice, and follow Him, whose sheep we are... for He is your shepherd. Amen!