

Sermon, May 8, 2022

John 10:22-30

“The Father and I are One”

In verse 27 of today’s reading Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice.” This refers back to the earlier part of chapter ten, in which he says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” The image of a shepherd was a common model of leadership in the Hebrew texts. An obvious example would be in this morning’s psalm, which begins, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Remember also that David was a shepherd that became a king. Also, as I mentioned recently, the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd was the earliest depictions of him in Christian art, with his figure standing with a lamb laid across his shoulders.

I’ve always been a little uneasy with the idea of Jesus’ followers as sheep. If you’ve ever been on a farm that has sheep, you know that they are pretty dumb animals; and I would hate to think that the followers of Jesus do so blindly without any serious thought about what they are choosing to do. Unfortunately, there is a segment of the contemporary church that is very anti-intellectualism, which undermines the church’s influence in the world.

However, when Jesus refers to himself as the shepherd that lays down his life for his sheep, and indicates that the sheep follow him because they know his voice, it speaks of the deep bond of love between Jesus and those who choose to follow, which extends beyond his Hebrew followers when he says in verse 16, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.” - referring, of course, to Gentiles. He continues this, saying, “I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd.” This is a foretaste of his prayer in chapter 17 of John, when he prays, “that they may all be one”. Something to keep in mind in the modern church, which is so broken and divided.

In this morning’s reading Jesus continues to speak of the bond between himself and his followers, saying, “I know them, and they will follow me.” He then goes on to say that he gives eternal life, and that no one can snatch them out of his care. This refers not only to them, but to us as well.

Jesus then ends this passage with the statement, “The Father and I are one.” This statement infuriates the Pharisees, which views such a claim as blasphemy, and they take up stones with which to kill him. A little later on he says, “...even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” (Recognize that Jesus lives in a patriarchal society, and so God is referred to as Father, but God is Spirit, without gender, and, if you prefer you may call God Mother.”

But putting that aside for now, what did Jesus mean when he said, “The Father and I are one.”? Well, if you think of this in terms of the later development, which we call the Trinity, then you’d say that they are both of the same nature, along with the Holy Spirit - that they are 3 in 1. But, if this is what was intended by John, he would have used the Greek word for the number one. Instead, he uses a word that means that they are together, or united, in spirit and purpose. The meaning of that statement has been debated for centuries, but the thing is, whether you see Jesus and the Father as sharing the same nature, or that they are united in purpose, it still proclaims the same thing - that when you see and hear Jesus you are seeing and hearing the will and purpose of God!

But then, further on in chapter 14, this goes a bit further when Jesus says, “On that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you.” And, also, in chapter 17, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me...”.

So, if Jesus is in God, and God in him - and, we are in Jesus, through faith, then we, as the sheep that hear his voice, are in God. We share in the purposes of God, if and when we are faithful to what Jesus taught and lived. In other words, if and when we lead lives that are compassionate, merciful, and forgiving, when we care for the poor, the downtrodden, and the marginalized, and when we advocate and strive for justice and peace, we are in unity with Jesus and the Father. Amen.

**Let us pray:** God, most gracious and kind, we look to you as shepherd, seeking your guidance as we face the many challenges life sets before us. We thank you for the gift of your Son who sets before us an example of life pleasing to you, and for your Holy Spirit who empowers us for ministry to a world so much in need of transformation - a world at peace in which there is justice for all, where the hungry are fed, the sick and wounded find healing, the lost find their way, the refugee a home, and all find reason to hope. Teach us what it truly means to be your children, bearing witness to your light revealed in and through Jesus. Lead the church to embody the unity that Jesus prayed for, and to find greater understanding and harmony with people of other faiths. Show us how to get beyond the hatefulness, the bigotry, and the ignorance that divides us. Grant us your wisdom and lead us into the ways of true love.

And, as always, we lift up to you those with special needs and the desire to feel your healing touch, remembering to you.

Amen.