

Sermon Reading: John 10:22-30 (NIV2011)

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade.²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me,²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Sermon Theme: The Good Shepherd Knows You

A young man grows up in the church. He is the Vacation Bible School king knowing all the stories and all the songs. If there was something going on in the church, he is going to be at it. Dad is a pastor—even a missionary to foreign countries like India and Mexico. But as life goes on things start changing. The once solid faith starts to shake. With time this man who believed it all now doesn't really believe anything. Maybe there is a higher being out there, but for him, it doesn't really matter.

This isn't a hypothetical made-up story. I recently met this guy and this all came out in the conversation we had. Sadly, it's not an uncommon story either. We can probably all think of someone who fits this bill: grew up knowing and in the Word but as life continues they fall away. What happened? As this guy did and as many others do they point to all sorts of reasons for how and circumstances that led to why. But for many, at one point they had the knowledge of Jesus. In fact they still have that knowledge—they still know who Jesus is. But even the demons in hell know Jesus (James 2:19). Jesus warns that on the Last Day many will cry out "Lord, Lord," claiming their allegiance and knowledge of Jesus, but he will say, "I do not know you" (Matthew 7:21-23). It's not just about what you know, but really who knows you. And as frustrating as that can be in other parts of life, what happens to you after your time on earth depends on it.

Here we are in John 10 with a group of Jews surrounding Jesus. They feel like Jesus has been holding out on them and so they demand that Jesus answers their question, "**If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.**" And Jesus tells them, "I've

already answered that question. You just don't believe it." He doesn't come out and say the exact words because he knows that, at best, they are looking for a Messiah—God's Chosen One—who would give them political power and earthly glory. Instead, he directs their eyes to the type of Messiah that God had actually promised to his people: the Savior of all mankind. And there was plenty of evidence for that Messiah in all the miracles and works that Jesus was doing. Jesus wasn't hiding anything to those who saw with eyes of faith.

You—and specifically you confirmation students—aren't like those Jews. You know Jesus. You know who he is. You know what he has done for you. For the past two years we have studied God's Word together and your faith has been strengthened. From your Examination your family and friends know that you know. With the essay answers that you will read you will show the congregation a short sampling of what you know. In a short while you will confess your faith that you believe in the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that you believe what God's Word teaches, and that this church's confession is accordance with what God's Word teaches. You have been given a good foundation of knowledge. You have done what God has called you to do growing in grace and knowledge. You have moved on from the milk of little Christian babies and began chewing on the meaty parts of God's Word wrestling with the truths and applying them to your life. Don't underestimate the great blessing and privilege that this is!

But it's not just about what you know. Maybe you've dealt with this a little bit already, if not, there will come a time when you question what you know and what right now you confess to be true. Temptations you said you can't believe others fall into, will be in your face and you might have to wrestle with yourself. Others temptations will come that many have wrestled with in some way. We hear the voice of human reason that tells us this Bible and what it says doesn't make sense. Human reason says these are neat stories to tell children and it's good for them; but maybe not so much as I get older. We hear the voice our own sinful nature that screams out that how can a loving God allow bad things to happen to others or why does he do this to me...it's not fair. We hear the voice of the world and our friends that tell you what you should be doing or what you need in your life. More often than not it's taking over being in God's house and studying his Word. Instead of listening to the voice of the shepherd, we listen to the voice of the devil with his lies and empty promises. "There's plenty of time later when you can get back to being more serious about your faith life if you want to. You don't really need the shepherd, you're just fine on your own," the devil wants you to believe.

But Jesus gives us a very clear warning. He told the Jews, **“You do not believe because you are not my sheep.”** Either you are part of his flock or you are not. There is no in-between. Either you believe or you do not. Just as clear as it is that Jesus is the Messiah, so it is clear: if you do not believe, you are not saved.

So what makes you so different? What makes you special?

Jesus knows you. You might not be able to remember or even know the first time you heard his voice. But that doesn't matter. It's not exactly about what you know, it's about who knows you. Jesus speaks to you through parents who maybe at a young age taught you, “Jesus loves me this I know.” Jesus speaks through your pastor that he forgives you all your sins. Jesus speaks through his Word where we hear his voice assuring you, “I am the Good Shepherd who cares for you, my sheep. I know you.” As knowing Jesus needs to be more than just having a knowledge about him, Jesus knowing you means he has a deep, intimate connection with you. He knows the number of hairs on your head, he knows you by name. He knows the day you were born and all the struggles you have faced since. More importantly, he knows that you were lost, so he, the Good Shepherd, came to find you. He knows how much your sins owed, and he died on the cross and paid for each and every one of them. He knows that he rose for you. He knows you were marked with the sign of the cross on your head and heart marking you a child of God when you were washed with water and the word in baptism. He knows that he has clothed you with his own personal goodness to wear as your own. And it's that Good Shepherd who promises, **“Because I know you, I give you eternal life, and you will never perish; no one will snatch you out of my hand.”**

That's a bold promise. And it might make you uncomfortable because we don't like dealing with absolutes like saying “never” or “always” because there's all different sorts of exceptions to the fact. We might wonder how this could be true because, again, we all know people who have fallen way. Understand this correctly. Mankind has a terrible and powerful capability to pull themselves away from Jesus. Jesus does not and did lose them. But when we chase after sin, it pulls us from Jesus. When one listens to those other voices they wander away from his flock. But if you focus on your own strength of faith, how good of a Christian you have been, if you hang your trust on what you've done in the past—like I went to Catechism class and was confirmed—you are putting your trust in yourself and what you have done.

The reason why you are saved is not because you made a choice, because you were able to do something different, or because you are so different from everyone else. By nature we each are just as lost, just as sinful as the next. Every sheep would fall away from Jesus and forsake him if left alone.

But you aren't. Jesus tells you, "I am the Good Shepherd." That means right now in this instant. Not sometime in the past he was or at some point in the future he will be. No, right now he is your Good Shepherd. He tells you, "I am your good shepherd who loves you. I am guarding you and protecting you. No one and nothing can come and take you away from my hands. I am more powerful than they are. If it were even possible, don't worry, the Father who is greater than all will never let you go. But that will never happen. You can trust that promise because I laid down my life and died on the cross for you. But I didn't stay dead. I picked that life back up again and rose. I live to lead you through this valley of death so that you don't need to fear any evil. I know sometimes you are afraid, but do not worry, I'm here with you. Even when you stray, I'm going to come after you. I'm not going to let you go even when you keep doing it again and again. I know how you are tempted to listen to those other voices, but I'm going to keep on calling out to you. When you feel alone and don't know how you are going to keep going or what you should do, I'm right here with you."

It's the voice of the Shepherd that keeps us in his flock. Keep hearing his voice and study his Word. It's his voice that sings through the many other distracting voices around us. Be in God's house in regular worship because it's here where your Shepherd's voice speaks to you in a special way. It's here where you receive the Good Shepherd's body and blood in the bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins and he draws you closer to him. You have been given a solid foundation of knowledge, use it and grow on it. And when you have questions, listen to your Shepherd's voice and his promise that he knows you. Amen.