**Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Easter-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

05-11-25

John 10:22–30

Jesus makes no secret regarding who he is. His words and his actions clearly show him to be the Christ. But the hardened heart remains deaf to Jesus’ words, and blind to Jesus’ works.

 “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” This is what the people who mobbed Jesus in the temple demanded of him. Jesus answered them; “I told you, and you do not believe.

 They did not believe, because they were not part of his flock. Jesus often used sheep and shepherds to illustrate the relationship between himself and mankind.

 It’s a very accurate illustration, for sheep are totally dependent upon their shepherd. Jesus said; My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

 The people who confronted Jesus as to who he is had no doubt heard the Scriptures. In fact, they were raised in the Scriptures.

 They heard the voices of the priests and the scribes, and they heard the voices of many other people, all saying many different things about Jesus.

Of the voices that they heard, the ones that they listened to were the ones that made the sweetest sound; the ones that justified their own thoughts and feelings and actions.

The voices that they listened to were the ones that encouraged them as they pursued their many and various idols, and justified them as they satisfied their sinful desires.

The voices that they listened to were those that comforted their own consciences and justified their own ideas about what is right and wrong; godly and ungodly; true and false; perverse and merely personal choice. In other words, they were people just like you, and just like me.

 Whose voice are you listening to? What shepherds do you follow? There are many in the world today who remain outside of Jesus flock.

Though the Scriptures are clear, though the Scriptures bear the Holy Spirit, who works faith when and where He will, many listen to the voice of their self-centered, fallen nature, and remain enslaved to worldly idols.

They remain enslaved to such things as material comfort and pleasure; social status; wealth; power; the belief that we make our own reality; that the so-called good that we do outweighs the evil.

 We love to hear those voices. We run to bow down and sacrifice to those false gods, earning for ourselves lives of meaninglessness, and in the end, eternal death.

 Jesus Christ is the voice of truth. He is the good and faithful shepherd who gives his sheep eternal life. He can do this because he himself is the book of life.

 Whose voice are you listening to? In the din of the world’s many voices, all of them calling to you, which one do you recognize as your shepherd’s voice; which one do you follow?

Is it the voice that soothes your conscience by telling you that your foul, hurtful words were deserved by the receiving party, that if you want to get to get ahead in life, you’ve got to step on some toes and push and shove your way to the head of the line?

 Is it the voice that says everyone cheats a little; it’s not wrong if everyone is doing it? Whose voice do you hear? Whose voice are you listening to?

Is it the voice that torments your conscience with all of those horrible things that you’ve said and done, the voice that drives you to think that no one could ever love you; ever accept you; ever forgive you?

Hear the voice that loves you enough to tell you the truth; that those harsh words, those selfish acts, these are all very bad, in fact they are evil; it’s called sin, and you should feel guilty, because you are.

Hear the voice that, having confronted you with this truth, then tells you even more truth. Hear the voice of the One who says to you “Although your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as wool; in fact, I myself have already taken them away from you, and you are forgiven”

 Hear the voice of the One who says “See my hands and my feet; I became sin for you, and your sin died on the cross with me; and now, you have eternal life.”

Hear the voice of the One who says to you “All of this I have done for you because I love you, and no one can snatch you out of my hand.

That voice is the voice of Jesus Christ. Hear the voice of love incarnate. Repent and believe, and follow him out of the darkness of sin and death into the light of life.

The encounter in our Gospel text took place on the occasion of the Feast of Dedication. You know this holiday by another name; Hanukkah; the festival of lights.

 It is the celebration of the miracle of the oil that kept the temple lamps burning brightly for eight days, when there was only enough oil for one.

 It was the feast of re-dedication of the temple that had been desecrated by the Seleucid invaders.

 The Maccabees defeated the heathen enemy, purified the temple, and re-lit the temple lamps with one day’s worth of oil; it was all that they had.

One day’s worth of oil; and yet, the sacred light burned brightly for eight days. Eight days; symbolizing eternity, and eternal light. In our Gospel text, though the people were celebrating the Festival of Lights, they remained in the dark; they failed to recognize, walking among them in the temple, the one, true, eternal light.

But you are not in the dark. Not with the light of faith burning in your heart, illuminated by the very Spirit of God through his eternal, unchanging word.

That word is the voice of Jesus Christ the Lord. Hear the shepherd, calling you to follow him in faith; faith that grants true comfort to the soul, and blossoms in fervent love toward the neighbor. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.