**Sermon – Sunday 8th May 2022 John 10: 22-30**

It is wintertime when the Jews are celebrating the Dedication of the Temple or Hanukkah. It is a celebration of the purification of the temple, thinking about God and the freedom the Jews have. Winters are cooler in Jerusalem and there can be snow so taking shelter in a covered portico out of the worst of the weather conditions seems like a sensible idea. Perhaps risky given that during the celebration the Jews are also remembering how they became kings and here is Jesus – the good shepherd, other people calling him the Messiah – a new king and a threat to the power the Jews hold. Perhaps easier too for those Judeans challenging Jesus to corner him to answer their questions.

The question that is asked of Jesus seems relatively straight forward “How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah tell us plainly”.

For those of us who have any experience of children around the age of 2 to3 the questions that you have to answer can be very wide ranging and persistent. That “why” questioning stage can prove to be frustrating at times. You wonder whether they have heard any of your imparted wisdom. Even when you have thought that final answer will surely squash the interrogation there may always be one more “but why”?

It was quite normal at the time that people who taught or prophesied were asked to give proof of their deeds and the power behind their gifts but these questions go beyond that – these are questions not only about Jesus identity but whether his power is truly from God.

Jesus shows none of the frustration of being asked the same question over and over but simply says “I have told you and you don’t believe me” How much clearer does he have to be? If they don’t understand from what has already been said then why try and explain even further. Is the issue more with the listener than with Jesus – those ears have listened to the message but haven’t heard or understood it as they are not responsive to it.

So Jesus offers the evidence “the proof is the work I do in my Father’s name.” Jesus had just healed a blind man but the miracle took place on the Sabbath. So if he is the son of God then surely he would not break the Sabbath by healing someone – does that make him a sinner or is he a man possessed by demons. But demons are destructive beings – not known for extraordinary acts of rescue and healing.

The healing of the blind man is miracle number six in John’s Gospel following:

* Turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana
* Healing of a government official’s son close to death
* Healing of a lame man at the sheep-gate pool
* Feeding of the 5,000
* Walking on water

All signs that this man is different - this man could be the son of God, the Messiah. But look at each of these miracles and those who were listening or asking Jesus to help were eager to hear and willing to believe. It is only through the eyes of faith that one can see the truth concerning Jesus.

And then we return to the sheep. “You don’t believe me because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

Jesus extends this message even further with the promise of eternal life “No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me….the Father and I are one.” Jesus will look after all who follow him and death itself will not be the end as there is the promise of eternal life. The reason Jesus can be so confident of this is the unbreakable bond of love and union with God the Father.

Tom Wright says “For Christians it’s always a love game; God’s love for the world calling out an answering love for us, enabling us to discover that God not only happens to love us ….but that he *is* love itself.” The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father and by the power of the Holy Spirit we are invited to know and share in that love. And how do we access that – through the human embodiment of that love – Jesus Christ. It is because of Jesus that we find ourselves called to live the way we do and to reflect the image of God into the world.

We can do that by living our daily life in touch with God – we can pray, read our Bibles and come to church. No relationship works unless we work at it. Along the way we will have doubts -events will happen that will make us question our faith and that isn’t easy. There may be times when like a sheep it is easier to follow the crowd even though it may lead to problems but the Good Shepherd will call us and bring us back to Him. The good news is that is doesn’t matter. God is a constant presence through the good and the bad - a light in the darkest of times.

 We can share the love of Jesus Christ that we know by helping out at events, supporting outreach activities in our community and listening, really listening when someone wants to talk. This book by Hannah Steele is called Living his Story. It was the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Lent Book for 2021 and was written at that start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It tells us that as Christian disciples we should share the Gospels and tell our story. It even tells us it is ok to take risks, ok to fail as long as whatever we do we are trying to follow Christ’s example and we do it with the love of God at the heart.

So if you choose to follow Christ, you can live a life knowing that you are loved, knowing that the Good Shepherd walks alongside you for eternity.

I think this quote from John Wimber, an American pastor and musician, sums it up well:

“We give our whole life; God should have ownership of everything.”

Amen.