

**May 8, 2022**  
**Christ the Servant, Reston**  
**Easter 4**  
**John 10:22-30**

**Three old men are sitting on a bench. The first one says, “It’s windy.” The second one says, “It’s not Wednesday. It’s Thursday.” The third one says, “I’m thirsty, too. Let’s go for beer.” Now, that is a story about people who *can’t* hear. Today’s gospel is about people who *won’t* hear. The setting is the great Temple of Solomon. Jesus is walking there, maybe meditating. The Jewish leaders gather around him and want to know why he hasn’t told them yet if he is or is not the messiah. Jesus said, in effect, “You haven’t heard what I have been saying. You haven’t listened.”**

**“My sheep hear my voice,” Jesus told them. I know them, and they follow me.” Now, let me pose a question for you. We have two groups of people here: The Pharisees and the disciples. Over a course of three years they have seen and heard the same thing. Yet, the Pharisees don’t “get it.” They haven’t heard what Jesus has been saying. Why do you think that is? There are two reasons why they don’t “get it” which I’ll explore in this sermon.**

**The first reason the Pharisees couldn’t seem to hear the voice of the shepherd has to do with psychology. There was a classic experiment in which they divided people into two groups. Group 1 was shown a series of numbers for five minutes. Group 2 was shown a series of alphabetic letters. Then both groups were shown a large image which either could be interpreted as either the capital letter “B” or the number thirteen (with the one and the three et very close together).**

Those who had been exposed to the letters interpreted the image as a “B” and those who had seen the numbers interpreted it as a thirteen. This isn’t that surprising. We are pre-conditioned to see the world in a certain way. The Pharisees had been exposed to rules and regulations, dos and don’ts, all of their lives. Therefore, when Jesus acted, they tended to see things through the lens of law. For instance, Jesus once healed a man who had been born blind. The man who had been blind saw that he had been miraculously healed and immediately fell down and worshiped Jesus as Lord. But the Pharisees were conditioned to see something different. What they saw was someone who had broken the law about healing on the Sabbath. They could only see that Jesus was a sinner who should be held accountable for his sins. To them Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” The Pharisees had not heard the voice and were not followers.

So, that was reason number one why the Pharisees couldn’t hear the shepherd’s voice and couldn’t be faithful. They hadn’t been conditioned to hear it. They couldn’t and they wouldn’t.

But there may be another reason the disciples could hear the shepherd’s voice while the Pharisees couldn’t. While the first reason had to do with psychology, this one has to do with theology. This one says that God gives faith to some people and withholds faith from others. Now, before you jump on one side and say, “I’m responsible for my own faith. I can choose to believe or choose not to believe,” ... before you jump to that claim, then remember what Luther wrote in his catechism when he was explaining what we mean when we confess in our creed that we believe in God as Holy Spirit. Luther wrote, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.” That might seem to say that

the Pharisees couldn't hear the shepherd's voice because God wouldn't let them. God gives faith to some and not others. God chooses some and not others.

So, why could the disciples hear the message of Jesus and the Pharisees couldn't? The psychological reason would say that the disciples were conditioned to hear it. The theological reason would say that God opened their ears to it. One way says faith is our responsibility. The other that faith is a gift from God.

Why is this even important? Well, if faith in God were something we were solely responsible for, then my task as a preacher would be to talk you into it or scare you into faith. I punched the wrong button on my car radio the other day and listened too long to an evangelistic preacher use the scare tactic to instill faith in his listeners. He told them that if they didn't believe they were going to hell. Hell was a real place, he said. It is in the center of the earth where there is sulfuric fire. He went on to describe, in gory detail, how you feel when your body is on fire and he emphasized that that torture is for eternity – unless you choose to believe. Right now!

I don't believe that and I don't think you do, either. We believe that it isn't so much that we choose God, but that God has chosen us. God has given us God's grace freely. We don't deserve what God gives, but God gives it anyway. At baptism we inherited the gifts of forgiveness, deliverance, and life eternal. All God's work. Not ours.

But it is possible to believe two seemingly contradictory things at the same time – that my faith is entirely a gift from God on the one hand and I bear some responsibility for my faith on the other. Faith happens when the good news is heard. That's how God gives faith. God gives God's word. But we need to actually *hear* it. We are about to sing a very lively

**and wonderful hymn which opens with the words, “Open your ears, O faithful people. Open your ears and hear God’s word. Open your hearts, O royal priesthood, God has come to you.”**

**Faith happens when the Word of God is spoken. And so, my task as a preacher is not to beg, plead, or cajole you into believing. It is not to scare you into believing. It is to tell you over and over again that God loves you. God gave God’s very life for you. Whatever failings you have, God has forgiven. It is my task to tell you time and again that God has come for those the rest of the society has left. God has come for the abandoned, the oppressed, and the imprisoned. Faith happens when the Good News is proclaimed.**

**So, here is the Good News, taken directly from John’s gospel read this morning. Are your ears ready? “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand.”**

**It’s windy. It’s not Wednesday, it’s Thursday. I’m thirsty, too. Let’s go for beer. The problem, my friends, is not with our hearing. It is with our listening!**

