

Year C Let Us Testify John 10 vv22 to 30

"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." All through John's Gospel, Jesus' identity has been a hot topic. We were told very plainly, at the beginning of the Gospel: Jesus of Nazareth is the Word of God, God made flesh who dwelt among us, the Light for the whole world. John also let us know at the very beginning, that some people would not accept Jesus. This sets up, for us to notice, those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God...and those who do *not* believe. This, really, is no different from what has happened down through the centuries, right into our time and place. Some people believe. Some people do not. We hear, today, some important words from Jesus that help us to grapple with this split and even how to overcome it, so let's take a closer look.

"If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." These are the Jewish leaders who are saying this to Jesus. As people encounter Jesus in John's Gospel, we hear them call him such things as "Rabbi" (teacher) and "Messiah", "Son of God", "King of Israel", "prophet", and "Saviour of the World". Most of the Jewish leaders, though, have a problem with this. As we've talked about many times before, the people in power want to keep their power. And so, while many, many others around them are proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, the Jewish leaders are not.

The people in power are getting increasingly worried about Jesus' growing popularity. They are openly angry towards Jesus calling him "demon-possessed" (7:20P and a "blasphemer" (8:57-59). The very next verse in this Gospel story that we don't hear today is that, "The Jewish [leaders] took up stones again to stone him" (10:31). Things are getting nasty. They would love to kill Jesus of Nazareth but his huge following prevents them.

“If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” These worried and angry leaders have heard the same teachings as the rest of the people. They’ve seen the same miracles as the rest of the people and yet there is a split: those who believe...and those who don’t. Jesus’ answer to them is, “I *have* told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me.” Jesus has recently given sight to a man who was born blind. The man he healed was brought before the Jewish leaders for questioning. “Tell us how he gave you your sight” they demand. And this man, healed and praising God says, “I have told you already, and you would not listen.” The man asks the leaders if they, too, want to become Jesus’ disciples and, when they scoff, the man says, “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” The leaders are insulted by this man’s words and they throw him out. Their only concern is that Jesus broke the rules. Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath. They are completely ignoring the implication of the miracle healing. The blind regaining their sight was, according to the Prophet Isaiah, a sign that God had returned among them, bringing the perfection of his kingdom. The Jewish leaders just don’t seem to be able to recognize this.

Isaiah said there’d be people like this. He writes, “You will be ever hearing, but never understanding; / you will be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ / This people’s heart has become calloused; / they hardly hear with their ears, / and they have closed their eyes” (Is.6:10). The people in power, seeing the evidence in front of them, still do not believe that Jesus is from God, the long-expected Messiah, and Jesus tells us why.

“You do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep” he tells them. “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” You don’t believe because

you're not one of my sheep. What Jesus is telling them is actually quite simple.

They do not believe because they have *chosen* not to believe. They have chosen to not become one of his followers – one of his sheep. God extends the invitation into his kingdom to everyone. It is always our choice to accept or not. The question to ask then is why? Why did these Jewish leaders choose not to believe? “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish,” Jesus tells them. Why would they not choose this? A very wealthy young man approached Jesus and asked him, “Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?” Jesus looked on this young man and loved him and said, “You must sell all of your possessions and give the money to the poor.” The wealthy young man turned sadly away from Jesus because he was not able to let go of his wealth (Matt.19:16-22). Jesus looks on us with love, extends the invitation into life in the kingdom with love. We accept it if we are able to let go of whatever is creating distance between us and God, if we can let go of the thinking and behaviours that do not belong in God’s kingdom. For the Jewish leaders in the story today, it was love of power that kept them from accepting. They enjoyed the perks of their power...they were important people with money and material goods. If they accepted Jesus as the Messiah, they would have to let go of their power and wealth...and they just couldn’t do that.

Each of us has thinking and behaviours and desires that interfere with our relationship with God. That’s actually quite normal. This is why being a follower of Jesus, one of his sheep, is always an ongoing process. We begin the process in baptism but then the journey toward total wholeness takes the rest of our lives with God’s help. The difference between us and the Jewish leaders in the story today is that we are trying to see God’s ways and to live God’s ways.

There are other people around us – perhaps even friends or family members – who are not putting in the ongoing work of discipleship or, perhaps, have chosen not to believe at all. The good news is that we don't need to necessarily worry about why they have made the choice they've made. Jesus tells us we can do something to reveal God's kingdom and build the body of Christ. That is, in a nutshell, why we have been called into existence together as the Church. So, what are we to do?

"The works I do in my Father's name testify to me," Jesus says. What we do matters. There is that saying that "actions speak louder than words", right? People notice what Christians do – and just as importantly, what they do not do. For example, if we say God is abundantly generous and yet we do not help someone in need, that gets noticed. The good things we do get noticed too. When John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus asking if he was, indeed, the Messiah, Jesus told them to notice what he was doing, notice his way of being and acting that *showed* them his answer to their question is "Yes." When Philip told his friend Nathanael that they'd found the Messiah and Nathanael skeptically replies, "Seriously? Can anything good come out of Nazareth?", Philip doesn't try to convince Nathanael with words, Philip says, "Come and see." Come and see for yourself. Come and experience it for yourself.

Our way of being and all that we do must show the love of God found in living the ways of God's kingdom. We absolutely should be letting the world know that the Church, the body of Christ, is being Christ in the world and for the world, bringing the world ever more into alignment with the wholeness of life in God's kingdom. Why is this up to us? Jesus says, "The Father and I are one." And just as he and the Father are one, we have become one with him as well because we have the Holy

Spirit dwelling with us, bringing us into the unity of the Holy Trinity. We are one with each other, we are one in the Lord.

Peter shows us today the amazing things we can accomplish through this oneness. He brings the dead woman, Tabitha, back to life. This may sound like an impossible task for anyone here. If you'd told Peter three years earlier that he was going to bring someone back to life, I'm quite certain that his response would have been that you were crazy. Each week we claim that God's power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Perhaps the problem is we have not asked or imagined anything much at all.

All of the small things we do – anything at all – that shows love, compassion, welcome, generosity, all of those things are works that testify to the presence of God and God's kingdom among us. But let's ask big. Let's imagine big. Let us continually ask and imagine that God's will and God's kingdom have come on earth as in heaven. Let us be that reality and live that reality. Because you know what happens when we do, right? God's will and God's kingdom will come on earth as in heaven. We don't know when and we don't know exactly how but we do know *that* is God's promise and God keeps his promises. The process began with Jesus who embodied God's kingdom and lived God's kingdom and passed that on to us. "The works I do in my Father's name testify to me." Let's go testify.