

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
May 11, 2025  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
We Know Jesus is Trustworthy and True

John 10:22-30 (EHV)

*Then the Festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup>and Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>24</sup>So the Jews gathered around Jesus, asking, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."*

*<sup>25</sup>Jesus answered them, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I am doing in my Father's name testify about me. <sup>26</sup>But you do not believe, because you are not my sheep, as I said to you. <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup>I and the Father are one."*

Dear Friends in Christ,

A three-year-old trusts Mom and Dad to provide food because when he goes to the fridge, he finds string cheese and oranges. He trusts his parents to provide shelter because he sleeps under a roof each night. He learns to trust his parents for clothing because his parents make him wear clothing even when he doesn't want to. Children trust their parents to provide this kind of daily bread without knowing how the parents do this. And I would not suggest trying to explain to a very young child the details of your family budget. They don't care how much you make or how much you allocate for food, clothing and shelter. The young child trusts that you will provide without knowing the details.

The Scriptures sometimes picture believers as children of our heavenly Father. But today, on Good Shepherd Sunday, we have heard and will hear some more about believers as sheep. Sheep care even less about the details than young children. No shepherd is going to spend any time or energy explaining to his sheep the details of how he provides for them. Sheep are not going to understand any of the details. But they know the voice of their shepherd. Sheep follow their shepherd. Sheep trust their shepherd because he does provide for and protect them.

Our Good Shepherd provides for and protects his sheep too.

We would like to know the details. Why won't Jesus just tell us how he is going to provide for us? How will he deliver us from everything that seeks to take us away? We are just sheep. Knowing the details is not going to make us safer in his hands – nothing can do that. Christ is trustworthy and true to all his promises. We, his sheep, believe him.

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This is the only reference to the Festival of Dedication in the New Testament. This is not one of the festivals commanded by the Lord in the Old Testament. It is, in fact, the holiday now called Hannukah. Some two hundred years before Jesus was born, a Greek ruler named Antiochus ruled over the land of Israel and more. He was a cruel king, especially to the Jews. He set up the worship of false gods in the temple of Jerusalem. He had sacrifices to these false gods done on the altar of the one, true Lord. He desecrated the temple and the altar so that the believing Jews could no longer use it. No longer could they give thanks to the Lord at the temple. No longer could they receive the promised atonement for sins through the sacrifices.

A man named Judas Maccabeus led a Jewish army to liberate Jerusalem about 164 B.C. He cleansed the temple so that it could once again be used for the worship of the one, true God. The Festival of

Dedication remembers the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus. You can read more about the history of this time in the books of 1 & 2 Maccabees. While not part of the inspired, inerrant Scriptures, these books are a historical record of these events.

So, Jesus was in Jerusalem when people were celebrating the rededication of the temple, when people would be focused on the true worship of God, the true teachings of God, the promises of God to his people Israel. The temple was the place where God dwelled with his people, sometimes visibly in the pillar of cloud and smoke. The temple is where God delivered grace to his people through the sacrificial system. Of course, Jesus should be at this festival. He is the once and for all sacrifice that fulfilled and ended all other sacrifices for sin. Of course, Jesus should be at this festival. He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is the Word who became flesh and made his dwelling among us. The people won't need a temple much longer because the Son of God has arrived, and Christ is the mediator between sinful humans and the Holy God.

But the Jews who gathered around Jesus were looking for him to say something that would allow them to bring him up on charges of blasphemy. They did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They just wanted Jesus to clearly say something they could use against him. *"If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."*

Now, we are not looking for evidence to use against Jesus. However, we might be asking Jesus to tell us plainly how and why certain things happen in our lives. I'm not a child. I'm not a sheep. I can handle any explanation God gives me. God, why won't you tell me the details? When we arrogantly think that God owes us an explanation for how and why he does what he does, we would do well to remember Job. God did not explain himself to Job. In fact, in the closing chapters of that book, the Lord humbled Job with these words:

*"Who is this who spreads darkness over my plans with his ignorant words? <sup>3</sup>Get ready for action like a man! Then I will ask you questions, and you will inform me. <sup>4</sup>Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you understand anything about it." (Job 38:2-4)*

Job had no business asking for a detailed explanation from God. We do not get to demand answers from God either. He does not owe us any explanation for anything he has done or will do. He is God. We are not. He is perfect. We are sinful. He is the Shepherd. We are the sheep.

The good news for us is that God knows that we are the sheep and he has compassion on his sheep. Jesus came to be the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. God did not ask for our opinion on how to save the world from sin and death. The Good Shepherd died to forgive sheep who had gone astray, including you and me. The Good Shepherd rose from death to give life to his sheep now and forever. The Good Shepherd does not owe us anything but has given us everything. He even gives us promises that are almost unbelievable except for the fact that the one who promises these things died and rose from the dead.

*<sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup>I and the Father are one."*

Your Good Shepherd knows you. Think about how many people you really know. You might recognize hundreds of people. You might have over a thousand following you on social media. But do you really know more than a handful of people? There are billions of people in this world and billions have lived before us. Many of these are believers whom Jesus promises to know. He knows all about each and every believer. He knows our weaknesses, our sins, our doubts, and our fears. He knows us completely and he loves us completely without condition.

Our Good Shepherd gives this wonderful promise to his sheep: *<sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.*

It is difficult to translate this promise into English because we treat double negatives as a positive. Literally, Jesus promises that we who believe in him will, “not not perish ever.” Where we can use one word – never – Jesus uses three words to emphasize that this “never” is never forever. Because Jesus lives, you will not die, even when you die. Because Jesus lives, all of his sheep live forever. How wonderful to be a little lamb of our Lord Jesus.

Our Good Shepherd continues to make amazing promises to us, his sheep.

*No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.*

War and violence is ongoing in the Middle East, in East Africa, in Ukraine, and in many places in this world. No ruler or army can pry open the nail pierced hand of Christ and take you away from your Savior. Jesus died and rose for you. No power of earth can overpower him. Sickness, disease, poverty, or disaster cannot knock you out of the hand of your Father in heaven. He made the universe and everything in it. He will not be overcome by his own creation. Temptation to sin and abandon the one and only Savior surround us. Our sinful nature wants to jump out of the hand of God. The world wants us to turn from the Good Shepherd and seek out our own truth. The devil is the prowling lion seeking to devour us. Our Good Shepherd promises to hold onto us with his hands marked with his sacrifice to save us. He promises that his Father is holding us in his powerful hand too.

We don't need to know how our Good Shepherd is going to keep all of his wonderful promises to his sheep. We are sheep who listen to our Shepherd's voice and believe him. For he is trustworthy and true.

Amen.