

Easter 4 Anne-Marie Jeffery
April 29, 2007
John 10:22-30

If you have ever been in the hallway at Epiphany on Sundays, just as you first come into the parish house from the garden, between 7:30 am and 8 am, you may have observed the ending of sign up for the Welcome Table breakfast. Our facilities are limited, and we close the sign up when we reach 200 names. Guests hoping for breakfast come in wanting to know if we are still taking names and instead hear from a volunteer – Sorry we are full. It is not an easy time for both guest and volunteer. Some guests get angry. Some are just disappointed. The volunteer has to deal with being the one that says no. There are other options for breakfast, but usually not for a hot one. The people that get turned away are out. They are not part of the 200 who will eat at Epiphany at what is sometimes called the “best breakfast” in town.

It is hard to be “out” whether it is about getting a hot breakfast or being chosen for the soccer team. It is something that occurs in our lives. Most of us have been “out” at one point in time. Sometimes it is about not getting a ticket to see the popular movie or not getting invited to the right party. Sometimes it is about not being in line for a promotion or not being chosen to make that great company trip. It affects our lives in big and small ways. It is the mantra of the TV reality shows – as they say on Project Runway, “You are out”. One would at least hope that when it comes to God, we are in - especially if we are trying.

However, in this morning’s gospel, there seems to be some people who are out. In the gospel, Jesus is talking to the Jews who have confronted him in the temple and tells them, “But you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” And there arises a question which I think worries many of us – Are we one of Jesus’ sheep? Are we one of the ones who hear his voice? How do we know we are hearing his voice? What is it that we are to believe? Now, I don’t blame the Jews for asking for clarification. They want who Jesus is to be clear. They want to know what Jesus really about. Is he the Messiah? I think we too want clarification, but our question might be “What do I have to do to be one of our sheep? Tell me plainly, a sentence or two - something simple that I can grasp and remember.” But there is no such answer, and Jesus’ answer is only - The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me.

And there it is – simple yet complex. We will find our way in Jesus’ works. It is by immersing ourselves into the stories and teachings of Jesus that we will be Jesus’ sheep and will hear his voice. Many of you already know the stories of Jesus – his “works” that are described in the whole gospel of John as well as in the other gospels; - Jesus’ acts of healing and giving life, - his words of teaching that demonstrate and embody the presence of God in the world. We know Jesus our shepherd from these stories.

This is how we hear his voice. In hearing about the turning of water into wine at the wedding at Cana, we learn about the kind of abundance that comes with God's presence. When Jesus chases the moneylenders out of the temple, we see Jesus issuing a radical challenge to the authority of the religious institutions of his day and a similar challenge to the institutionalism of the contemporary church. In Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well, we have an encounter that transforms conventional expectations and challenges the status quo. In Jesus' feeding the five thousand, we learn about us the true bread of life – the bread that will always feed us. In the washing of the disciple's feet, Jesus reminds us of what true servant hood is about – being vulnerable to one another and serving one another. In his giving up of Jesus' life for us on the cross so that we may be saved, we hear how much God loves us – so much that he sent his only son to live on this earth and suffer and die for us.

All these works of Jesus – all his actions and his teachings form us over time – in our study of them, in our internalizing of them, in making them a part of our lives and who we are. We can't pluck out a verse here and a verse there to believe in.

Following Jesus cannot be summed up in a 30 second commercial or in a sentence or two which we can look at and decide if we are going to follow Jesus or not. We must look at the whole of Jesus' life and that takes time. Being one of Jesus' sheep is a process – not a quick one. And maybe sheep are a good image for us to have. I remember one preacher describing all of us as big smelly sheep, not too smart, trying to follow the shepherd, and ending up going the wrong way when left to ourselves. We are sheep who have to be guided, to be taken care of and to be loved. Christian life is about being with the herd. Christian life is about being led here and being led there and trying to figure how we can live it.

Following Jesus is about listening to his word to us and being with each other in hearing of his word. Following Jesus is a journey that we go on. We show up. We follow. We listen and we try to incorporate the stories of Jesus life on this earth in to our lives and into our being. We try to hear our savior's voice. We yearn for our Saviour voice. We yearn for that life giving voice.

And yet, as we yearn we worry. Are we in or are we out? Are we one of Jesus' sheep? That question of whether we are saved or not always lurks in the back of our mind even knowing that we are to look to Jesus' works. But we have the reassurance God wants us to be in. God welcomes us in. God calls us to be part of the herd. We are being asked to show up and bumble along with the rest of the herd, giving ourselves over to the chances and changes of life that come with following God; - to believing in the abundance of God, to challenging the institutionalism of our church and the status quo in society, to believing in the bread of life that can feed us all, to practicing servant hood, where we love and serve each other, and to believing that God loves us so much that God his Son on this earth to suffer and die so that we might know of this love.

So join the herd. Stay in the herd. Listen for the shepherd voice. Know the stories of the Bible and listen to each other's stories of faith. If you don't know the Bible stories, go to the bookstore and find some reflections on gospel stories and start

reading. Listen to Jesus' teachings - the ones we hear each week as the gospel is read. Wrestle with them and see how they affect who you are and how you live. Get out there in the world and be one of the sheep – one of the sheep that hears Jesus' voice and follows. Be what you are. Don't worry as a member of the herd, you are already in. You are the beloved of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.