

No Double Talk

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John 10:22-30 22 Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. 24 The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

Double Talk – that phrase is used to describe speech that is meant to deceive. Double talk is designed to sound like it is saying something important but you are never really sure what that something is! Upon inspection, we discover that most double talk is a bunch of nonsense. Let me give you a few examples

- When a patient died, the attending doctor recorded the following on the patient's chart: "Patient failed to fulfill his wellness potential."
- The Army calls them "vertically deployed anti-personnel devices." You probably call them bombs.
- At McClellan Air Force base in Sacramento, California, civilian mechanics were placed on "non-duty, non-pay status." That is, they were fired.
- The Minnesota Board of Education voted to consider requiring all students to do some "volunteer work" as a prerequisite to high school graduation.
- Scott L. Pickard, spokesperson for the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, calls them "ground-mounted confirmatory route markers." You probably call them road signs, but then you don't work in a government agency.
- According to the FAA, it was just a case of "uncontained blade liberation." You and I would say the propeller blade broke off.

When you hear the expression "Double Talk," what do you think of? Politicians? A disreputable salesman? Someone saying one thing one minute and something completely different the next? That is what "Double Talk" is. In today's Gospel lesson, the Jews wanted an answer from Jesus with no Double Talk: *If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.* No confusing or deceptive words. Give us a plain answer. And Jesus did so, doubly! Not Double Talk, but a two-fold answer. He answered first with His **WORDS** and also with His **ACTIONS**.

The imagery of this passage is of the **Good Shepherd and His Sheep**. The Fourth Sunday of Easter has this as its emphasis every year. Jesus wants us to know that He is the Good Shepherd and we are His sheep. That is the message He was trying to convey to the Jews, and also to us.

The setting was the Feast of Dedication, what we know today as **Hanukkah**, an eight day festival of light commemorating the Jewish victory under the Maccabees and the rededication of the desecrated Temple in 164 B.C. Just as it does today, this Feast of Dedication took place in December. So it was winter, when it is cold outside. The question of the Jews to Jesus indicates it was also cold in their hearts. *"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."* This passage, today's Gospel reading, is the plain and clear answer of our Lord. Actually, it is a reiteration of what He has already told them. The problem was not that Jesus had not told them who He was--the problem is that the Jews did not like the answer Jesus gave. He was not the type of Christ the Jews were expecting or wanting.

It was no secret who Jesus was. He had told them before. In John 4, Jesus was speaking to the Samaritan woman. *The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."* (John 4:25-26) Can it be any more straightforward? In the next chapter, the Jews were ready to do Him in for *making himself equal with God*. (John 5:18). They understood the claims He made, but they did not want to accept it.

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep." Jesus had told them the truth with words: *I did tell you ... my sheep listen to my voice.* The problem was the Jews, His own people, did not want to believe. They were not of His flock. Their unbelief means they were not His sheep. They could not understand the plain truth He told them because they were lost sheep. Jesus had also told them plainly with His actions. The miracles that He did in His Father's name spoke for Him. Yet they refused to believe. Unbelief will not accept the truth of even miracles.

It takes both words and actions. There were and still are false christs, false Messiahs who tell people who they think they are, but their deeds fall short of verification or authentication. In contrast to this, the actions of Jesus substantiate His words.

Sheep that belong to another shepherd will not recognize, follow, obey or believe this good shepherd. The Jews should have been asking two questions. In addition to the one they asked, *Are you the Christ*, they should also have asked, "Are we the sheep of the Good Shepherd?"

Jesus identifies those who belong to Him: *My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me.* The voice is crucial. I think we can appreciate the power of voice recognition. Parents can be sitting in one room, and there will be twenty kids in the next room. When they hear a child crying, do they all get up? No, only the one whose child is crying. They are able to discern if it is their child just by the cry he or she makes. Not only that, but they probably can tell if it is a hurt cry or a cry of frustration or anger and so on.

Jesus was describing something similar. *My Sheep know my voice.* Two shepherds can utter the same words, but the sheep will follow the one and not the other. The voice makes the difference. They hear, they know, and they follow.

When the Jews asked Jesus to answer them plainly, they got just that. Not only did He tell them that He was the Christ, but He told them why His Father had sent Him into this world. *I give eternal life.* Could He speak any more clearly? Eternal life comes as a gift. Eternal life is given by the one who alone is big enough to make such an offer to the world, the one who can deliver on His Word. He accomplished forgiveness and life through His death in our place and His victory over the grave. He backed up His words with actions. Eternal life is His to give. It is ours to believe and receive by faith.

As sheep who know the voice of our shepherd, the confidence you and I can have comes from the promise of Jesus: *they shall never perish.* Death has been destroyed. The soul who believes will live. It will not perish. The resurrected body will not perish. They will not experience life without God. This is what the Christ has accomplished for us by dying and rising again.

Not only that, but the next part of this passage tells us that no one can snatch us out of the hand of our Shepherd, Jesus. He adds no one can snatch us out of the Father's hand. Think of those comforting words of security. The proximity we have to God is pictured by Him holding us securely in His hand. Our closeness to God is not dependent on the hold we have on Him, but on the hold God has on us!

One of the orders of worship that is seldom used today is the order of Matins, found on page 32 in the front of our hymnals. Turn to that with me now. I would venture that many of you have never even heard of Matins, but it has a special place in my memory. Every Wednesday in the

parochial school I attended we had chapel service. Most of the time we used the order of Matins, which is a morning service. We would sing the Venite, on page 33, which comes from Psalm 95.

Oh come, let us sing unto the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods, In His hands are the deep places of the earth. The strength of the hills is His also. The sea is His and He made it and His hands formed the dry land. Oh, come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.

That hymn of praise which I have known for longer than I can remember, has been my constant reminder of what Jesus is saying here: we are the sheep of His hand. He has a hold on me and will not let me go.

There are a lot of lost sheep in our world. There are those still demanding, *if you are the Christ, tell us plainly.* Jesus continues to speak, telling the world through His Words and His Actions that He is the Good Shepherd. He speaks plainly and miraculously today through Word and Sacrament, giving faith and everlasting life. Jesus tells us not with Double Talk, but with His WORDS and ACTIONS, that He is our Good Shepherd, our Messiah, Our Savior. Through faith, we are His sheep who know His voice.