

C Easter 4 5.8.22

John 10:22-30

Focus Statement: We can never be snatched from Jesus.

“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” I learned a translation fun fact about this question this week that I want to share with you. One, because as you well know, I love me some good fun facts. But two, because I think understanding the tone of this question is important before we dig into the passage itself.

First off, like I always want to do when we come across it in John’s Gospel, a word about “the Jews.” I’ve said it before, I’ll say it again, every time we come across it, especially with the current increase in antisemitism, “the Jews” in John’s Gospel, in all of the New Testament, is not the same as those who identify as Jewish in our modern context. This is Judea, except for the handful of Romans and Gentiles who are clearly identified as such, everyone else in scripture is Jewish. It is not accurate to hear of this group of “the Jews” challenging Jesus and imagine the people who worship at Temple Beth El on North Capital. Jesus, after all, was Jewish. All his disciples were Jewish. Except for the handful of identified gentiles, everyone he interacted with was Jewish. This interaction even takes place in the Temple itself, in the Portico of Solomon, sort of a sheltered area that was good for walking in the winter. Point being, the group that challenged Jesus throughout his ministry wasn’t generic followers of the Jewish faith. It was specifically power players. People who gained status through their role in various religious circles, and for whom Jesus and his lifting up of the oppressed threatened their sense of power. I say this again, not just because it’s important for us to not read antisemitism into this, but also because it helps us see how this interaction still relates to our time. Because, fun fact friends, people angling

for power at the expense of those they claim to represent, still very much a thing. And this passage addresses that.

So, to the translation fun fact itself. This group came to Jesus with the question, “how long will you keep us in suspense?” Here’s what’s fun about this question. This is not a great translation. The literal Greek translation of this question is “How long are you taking away our life?” “How long are you taking away our life,” which to this day actually, is an expression in Greek that basically means “how long will you continue to annoy us?” It’s the Greek equivalent of “how long are you going to be a pain in the neck?”

To really understand the irony of this question, we also have to look at it in context. John chapters nine and ten are part of the same story of the healing of the man born blind. Very quick recap of the story, Jesus met a man born blind and gave him sight. And immediately the Pharisees were like, no way was this man really blind, and started an investigation. Series of conversations ensue with the Pharisees, the man, his parents, the neighbors, with the Pharisees continually insisting, you weren’t really blind were you, or you can’t really see now, can you. And the man reiterating, I was blind, now I’m not, this is all I can tell you. Version of the same question, really. The Pharisees, “tell us plainly that you’re lying.” The man, “I’m telling you as plainly as I can, I was blind, now I see.” Eventually, the Pharisees kicked the man out of the community. Jesus went to the now exiled man, brought him back into his community, and then launched into what is known as the Good Shepherd discourse, this long speech by Jesus about how he is the good shepherd who looks after the sheep. Shepherds, remember, being a metaphor for kingship, and specifically for the sort of

God-ordained rule of King David. So, it's a metaphor, but it's a Messianic metaphor. Also, this is chapter ten, which in John's Gospel is coming up on the end of Jesus' ministry.

Chapter eleven is the raising of Lazarus, by twelve Jesus will declare that his hour has come, and thirteen is the last supper. We're there, friends. The "works that I do" that Jesus said he did "in [his] Father's name," the ones that "testify to [him]," they've seen these works. They've seen miracles, the water turned to wine, walking on water, feeding of the five-thousand, healings, exorcisms, etc. They've also heard him teaching. Heard all he had said about who he was and what he came to do.

They've heard, they've seen, he's "told them plainly." The problem wasn't Jesus's withholding of information, it was their disinterest in—refusal of, even—having their perceptions shifted. That's the difference between these people and Jesus' disciples. It isn't that Jesus' disciples totally understood everything Jesus said and did, and these guys to not. Case in point: Simon Peter. It's not that Jesus' disciples did everything Jesus told them to do, and these guys did not. Case in point again: Simon Peter. It isn't even that Jesus' disciples knew Jesus was the Messiah already. Again, from Simon Peter we see the disciples really have no idea who Jesus was or what he came to do. The only thing that separated these questioners from the disciples was that Jesus' disciples heard and recognized Jesus' voice because they were known by Jesus.

This is a little confusing, I'll be honest with you, because I can say a lot of attributes of Jesus, but, at least in my life, clarity of speech has not been one of them. The number of times I have straight up heard the voice of God say "do this," is zero. The number of times I have

known confidently that I was following God's path, maybe three. And two of those three were because it was so glaringly, almost humorously obvious, that there was only one logical choice. I mean, I suppose in choosing a seminary I could have picked the one that when I called to schedule a prospective student visit, told me no, or the one where, at my prospective student visit, the Dean of Students said she wouldn't go to that seminary, but given the series of odd experiences, LSTC really was the only rational choice. But normally, I get God's voice most clearly in hindsight. I know now that coming to Trinity was the call of God, but I'll be honest with you, when I had to make that decision, it involved an agonizing weekend long pro-con list. Every missional experiment we've tried in the last eight years has been a total shot in the dark, let's throw this at the wall and see if it sticks. Some of them have stuck; hello handicap accessible restroom and friends joining us on Facebook Live. Others, I think of the first attempt at a block party. Not the one a couple years ago with the bounce houses, but the one like six years ago that was just Bill Sullivan playing hopscotch by himself. Not so much a success there, outside of learning that Bill was pretty good at hopscotch. Nothing we've tried, and really just about no choice I've ever made, has been because I've heard the clear voice of God telling me plainly where to go. It's all been stumbling in the dark hoping the path I'm on is the right one.

And that, dear people of God is the good news and the promise of this text. "My sheep hear my voice" and, most importantly "no one will snatch them out of my hand." This passage is the clear and strong promise that God has us, that everything we have and everything we are is anchored not on our accomplishments, experiences, or lack of doubt, but is anchored instead in the God who is our Shepherd, who knows us, who loves us, and who calls us.

Dear people of God, we don't get told plainly. Oh, I wish we did. Well, I guess I can't be that broad, I can only speak for myself, I do not get told plainly. The voice of the shepherd has never been all that clear for me. What we get instead is the promise that we are God's. That we are held by God, that we are loved by God, and that no matter how far we wander in search of that elusive voice, nothing can ever snatch us from the watchful eye of the one who loves us. Thanks be to God. Amen.