

John 10:22-30  
Acts 9:36-43

The tenth chapter of John's Gospel is often known as the Good Shepherd chapter. Here Jesus refers to himself as a shepherd. It is obviously a metaphor.

Jesus wasn't really a shepherd. He did not provide care for a flock of sheep.

But he used that metaphor as a way to describe what he was doing. Jesus often described himself with metaphors.

He said things like:

I am bread  
I am the door  
I am the way  
I am living water

Each one of these images tells us something about Jesus  
But they do not describe him in a literal sense  
They are metaphors  
You need to decipher them

So it's not surprising that some of the people who came to see Jesus  
asked him to describe himself in a clearer fashion

*Tell us plainly, they said*

*Who are you?*

*Are you the Messiah? The One God promised to send*

*Tell us straight out*

So Jesus gave them a very straight answer

*Abba God and I are one*

Nothing ambiguous there

No question about it

Jesus is one with God – one and the same

Of course, the Jewish religious leaders did not like to hear that  
They believed that anyone who claimed to be one with God was  
committing blasphemy

It was a terrible sin to claim to be equal to God

In fact, it was a sin punishable by death in the OT

If Jesus was claiming he was God

--he would be in big trouble with the Jewish religious leaders

But Jesus was not just making that claim

--he was not just talking about being God

--he was living it

Jesus knew that talk was cheap

Just about any deranged person could claim that they were God

So Jesus told them, that if they did not want to believe what he said

--they should look at what he did

His actions confirmed his words

Or, as Jesus says here in our Gospel:

*The works that I do in my Abba's name testify to me*

Jesus' actions showed people who he was

If a person paid attention to what Jesus said and did

--it would be obvious that he was God

I believe it is fair to say that Jesus' actions show us God

Jesus was God

That means,

--that to see Jesus was to see God

--to hear Jesus was to hear God

God was speaking and acting through Jesus

So when we see Jesus in the Gospels healing people of various diseases

--we see God's compassion for those in need

When we hear Jesus telling stories about the need to care about people

who are different from us (like those foreign Samaritans)

--we are hearing God's word about loving strangers

When we see Jesus honoring the poor and widows and women

--we see God's preference for outcasts of society

--people who were second even third class

When we see Jesus breaking the OT laws in order to help people

--we see God's emphasis on people over laws

Look at the life of Jesus

Look at what he did

Then you can see what is important to God

For Jesus and God are one

Jesus' actions are the actions of God

Jesus says that he is a shepherd

--and that people who believe in him are his sheep

(--back to the metaphors again)

Jesus rightly points out that sheep will follow their shepherd

In fact, sheep are not like cattle

--you can't herd them from behind

--they will just scatter all over

Sheep need to have a shepherd in front of them

--which they will then follow

That is a beautiful picture of the Christian life

Christians follow Jesus

He leads the way

--and we follow

Jesus says that if someone is really one of his sheep

--they will hear his voice

--and they will follow him

I worry today that we as Christians are forgetting what it means to be a Christian

--it's not in building big churches

--it's not in gaining a lot of power

--politically

--financially

--socially

Being a Christian really means

--hearing Jesus call you

--and responding to that call

--by living the way Jesus lived

How does someone else know you are a Christian?

--because they can see you doing the things that Jesus did

Our words about Jesus are nice. But it is our actions that show that we are followers of Jesus, our Shepherd. It shows in how we live.

In our reading from the Book of Acts this morning we hear a wonderful story about a woman named Tabitha (aka Dorcas)

She was a disciple of Jesus

--not one of the 12, but a disciple, a follower

Listen to how she is described in the Bible:

*She was full of good works and acts of charity (Greek: Mercy)*

People knew she was a disciple of Jesus

Because she spent her time going around and helping people

She lived her faith out in her life

It showed in the things that she did

It showed in how she treated people with compassion

And when Tabitha died, people gathered around

--not just to mourn her death

--but to show the things she had done for them

--coats and garments

--clothing for the poor

Her life was full and rich

--full of good deeds and acts of mercy

I actually knew a person once named Tabitha  
 But during the course of my 40 years of parish ministry I really knew many  
 Tabitha's

--that wasn't really their names  
 --but that's the kind of people they were  
 --full of good deeds and charity

They were women would were the back bones of congregations  
 They were women who worked unstintingly in the congregation  
 They were dedicated, and committed  
 --you could count on them to be there when you needed them

Now, to be fair, there were men like that, too  
 --but this is Mother's Day  
 --we are honoring the women

And besides, for way too long in the church, women did not receive the  
 honor they were due

For way too long in the church women were considered second class –  
 couldn't vote, couldn't serve in offices, couldn't be pastors

Thankfully, we have changed that, at least in the ELCA

We appreciate the talents and gifts and abilities that women offer in our  
 congregations

I am grateful for the many Tabitha's who continue to show they are  
 followers of Jesus by their acts of kindness and good deeds

Like Tabitha of old, their faith is lived out in their lives

Don't tell me what a wonderful Christian you are

Show me

Show me by

--your compassion  
 --your mercy  
 --your love

Which is what Jesus did

--and what Jesus did  
 --God is – God is compassion, mercy, love

One time a traveling evangelist came to a small Midwestern town

He met a farmer in the local café and asked him:

“Are you a Christian?”

The man said, “Why are you asking me?” You should be asking my  
 banker, my accountant, the manager at the elevator, the clerk at the  
 feed store. They are the ones who can tell you if I am a Christian or  
 not.”

How do we live our lives?

That shows if we are following Jesus, the Good Shepherd, or not

We follow Christ by doing the same things he did

One of the best ways to describe a church is to say it is a sheep pen  
 Here we all are gathered together as sheep  
 Why do we gather together?  
 So we can hear the voice of Jesus  
 And we can follow him

This community of believers called University Lutheran Church of Hope is  
 really all about helping each other to be sheep  
 --people who follow the Good Shepherd

What did Jesus do to bring God's Kingdom to earth?

Jesus started a community  
 --a community of believers  
 --a community of people who wanted to follow  
 --people who cared about each other  
 --and cared about God's world

That was what Jesus believed would attract people to his teaching, his way  
 of life

A community of people. A community of love.

Our congregation has the privilege of being that kind of a community

A community founded on Jesus

A community trying to hear Jesus' voice and follow him

A community that has a message to share with everyone around us

That message is simply Jesus

--we are his body

--we live like him

Erasmus was a Dutch philosopher, Christian theologian, and one of the  
 greatest scholars of the Renaissance. He once told a story which has  
 become a classic. In the story, Jesus returns to heaven after His time on  
 earth. The angels gather around Him to learn what all happened during  
 His days on earth. Jesus tells them of the miracles, His teachings, His  
 death on the cross, and His resurrection.

When He finishes his story, Michael the Archangel asks Jesus, "But what  
 happens now?" Jesus answers, "I have left behind eleven faithful disciples  
 and a handful of men and women who have faithfully followed me. They  
 will declare My message and show My love. These faithful people will  
 build My church." "But," responds Michael, "What if these people fail?  
 What then is Your other plan?" And Jesus answered, "I have no other  
 plan!"

If Jesus is indeed your Shepherd

--listen to his voice

--and follow him