

Sermon ✚ May 8, 2022  
John 10:22-30  
Frank Maxwell

A hospital chaplain in Garden City, Kansas shares this story:

I was recently called to the hospital emergency room to provide spiritual care to an 18-year-old woman who was beaten by her boyfriend. I do not lay the blame on her for being the victim of this beating. She had made some poor choices that may have complicated the situation.

She had a drug and alcohol problem, which was raging out of control, in addition to the fact that she was living with a very abusive man more than twice her age. In order to offer her some help, I had to address some of the obvious areas of struggle in her life. But according to her, she didn't have any problems. The boyfriend was a good man, who had "a good heart." Drugs were not a problem, or at least not anymore. *"I had to learn some lessons,"* she would say, *"but that is my choice, and I am willing to live with the consequences."*

No matter how hard I tried to help this woman see what was painfully obvious to everyone else around her, there was no convincing her of the truth.

Jesus also spent much of His time trying to convince people of the truth. In today's lesson, the Jews were pressuring Jesus to tell them if he was the Christ. He had told them already but they would not believe it. They also would not accept any of the signs and wonders he had done that bore witness to who he was.

The reason, Jesus said, is because they did not belong to his sheep. They were not part of Jesus' flock. Rabbi Edwin Friedman has said, *"The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax or eloquence or rhetoric or articulation but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you and they are not likely to when your words are pursuing them. Attitudes are the real figures of speech."*

Communication is not so much about convincing people about facts as it is about direction and approach. We cannot communicate with someone who is walking away from us. In many instances we are pursuing people with our truth and trying to chase them down and convince them that we are right. Most of the time we will never catch them.

The Jews would not receive what Jesus was saying because their hearts were not with him. They were not part of *his* sheep.

While their words implied that they wanted to draw near to Jesus, their hearts were already running in the other direction.

And when we consider sharing our faith (if that is something we are bold enough to do) . . . just as Jesus faced opposition to the truth, so *might* we.

The *solution*, is not found in pursuing others *with* our words, but rather inviting them to approach us so that we can sit down with them face to face. This can also be a difficult task in preaching.

The effective preacher does not chase people with mandates and moral platitudes, but rather invites them to sit down with the truth and experience the truth for themselves. Effective preaching, much like Jesus' style, is invitational.

Jesus said, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*" Good preaching invites people into relationship, both with the preacher, and with God. The preacher invites *their* audience into their thoughts and reflections and even *his/her* own inner struggle with the passage . . . and then invites the people to wrestle with the truth for themselves. At least, that's how I view this discipline.

Over the years, the Church has offended people not because of the truth that was spoken, but because of an ungodly attitude that was echoed throughout the message.

Jesus did not bother to convince the Jews with words. He knew that in their case words were inadequate. Instead, Jesus referred them to his works. "*The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me.*"

Words often lack power to convince because they can also be used to deceive. Jesus could have said he was the *Christ*, but he had a much stronger testimony in his favor. The works that he did bore witness to who he was.

You can talk about your faith all you want. You can tell people you believe. You can tell people about St. Luke's but people are also watching you. "*If his faith/her faith is so important, why do they act that way?*"

Jesus sets an example for us in how he shares the truth with those who have yet to believe. Actions and attitudes speak louder than words.

The scriptures of this Easter season focus on maintaining an authentic testimony and living a life that is consistent with scripture and godly principles.

Our testimony will have the most impact when it is backed by the power of a godly lifestyle and a compassion that is shared with all we meet.

This day, John invites us to recognize that Jesus is offering spiritual direction . . . both to persons who do not follow nor recognize him as shepherd of their lives, and to those who hear his voice and follow him.

Maybe you are thinking this day of someone close to you who does not participate in church . . . and you wish they would. Perhaps it is a friend, a child or a spouse. And maybe it has even been a source of friction in your relationship.

You've talked to that person until you were blue in the face . . . and maybe that's been the problem.

The identifying marks of our ministry include strengthening the weak, healing the sick, and binding the injured . . . along with speaking the truth in love and clarity.

This kind of ministry takes time, patience and a prayerful presence.

All this and more can be yours . . . you simply need to ask God.

In the name of this very same God, we pray. Amen.