

*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**John 10:22-30 (EHV)**

<sup>22</sup> Then the Festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon's Colonnade.

<sup>24</sup> So the Jews gathered around Jesus, asking, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I am doing in my Father's name testify about me. <sup>26</sup> But you do not believe, because you are not my sheep, as I said to you. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."



*Dear Heavenly Father, as we listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd, send your Holy Spirit upon us so we may be comforted by his promises of life and security. Amen.*

Jesus says his sheep hear his voice. So, as faithful sheep who listen to him, we regularly attend worship to hear God's Word and gather around his blessed banqueting table to be fed by him. This is right and good for us as his beloved sheep.

But if we're honest with God and with ourselves, we're not always very good at listening. We don't listen well to God, and we don't listen well to each other. Instead, we usually listen to ourselves and our own presumptive opinions as our self-centred thoughts rattle about in our minds all day long!

Despite this problem, let's try to listen carefully to what Jesus is saying to us today.

For starters, it's helpful to consider the context of his words. Earlier in John chapter 10 Jesus referred to himself as the Good Shepherd and the Gate for the sheep. He's already unpacked what this means for his hearers, but he's now moved on to a different time and setting for a new conversation about his 'Good Shepherding' which took place at the Feast of Dedication.

It's likely we'll be tempted to ignore the context of Jesus' words because many of us don't know what this 'Feast of Dedication' was all about. Even if we were told another name for this festival is 'Hanukkah,' it still wouldn't mean much for us.

In this case, the Feast of Dedication (or Hanukkah) came about between the Old and New Testaments, which is recorded in the Deuterocanonical books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Maccabees. Most of us don't have these books in our Bibles, but some Catholic Bibles include them.

What happened is that Judea had been invaded by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He outlawed Judaism and desecrated the Second Temple in Jerusalem by erecting an altar to Zeus in it and sacrificed pigs on it (which is an unclean animal for the Jews). I mean, imagine if someone broke into your church and messed with all your holy things!

This led to a large-scale revolt led by the Jewish priest Mattathias and his five sons, one of whom was Judah Maccabee, who liberated the Temple and rededicated it. Hanukkah means 're-dedication' or 'renewal' and this historic event is celebrated every year for eight days, often around about the time we celebrate Christmas. In Jerusalem, it would be winter when this festival normally takes place.

So, we learn the context of Jesus' conversation is when they're celebrating the re-dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. In fact, the conversation takes place as he's walking in the 'Colonnade of Solomon' which is part of the holy Temple complex.

As Jesus walks with the Jews within the Temple complex at this important time when they celebrate its re-dedication and renewal, they start to think about the restoration and renewal of the kingdom of God, which is promised to occur when the Messiah comes.

This is why they ask the question: Is Jesus the promised Messiah or not? Is now the time when the Kingdom of Israel (and the Temple) will be restored in all its glory because the Messiah is finally here, or do they have to wait for someone else?

Jesus' reply almost makes us wonder if he was shaking his head and rolling his eyes!

He says he's already told them, *but they're not listening very well*. He's shown them his glory and power, *but they're not paying close attention*. He's already bringing in the kingdom of God, *but they don't recognise it*. He states the reason why they don't believe he's the promised Messiah is because they're not his sheep. You see, if they were really his sheep, *they would listen, recognise, and respond differently*.

For the Jews who considered themselves to be God's faithful holy flock, Jesus' comment saying they weren't his sheep would have shocked them! But I wonder if it might challenge us too.

For example, do you also listen to Jesus carefully? Are you paying close attention to his saving work – not only what he did through his death and resurrection, but even his work here and now in our church today? Are you listening to the voice of Jesus, or are other voices (including your own internal monologues) grabbing more of your attention? Do the words you hear in the readings and the sermon last beyond the time you walk through those doors at the back of the church?

Yet, despite our struggles to listen very well, Jesus wishes to comfort and bless his faithful sheep, including you and me.

Jesus says: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.”

John 10:27-28

These are precious words for us to mull on, contemplate, study, consider, and take to heart. They reassure us of six important realities for faithful listening sheep which we can trust.

1. **Jesus’ sheep don’t just listen once or twice, and we’re done.** Jesus’ sheep are ‘listening’ people. We keep listening to Jesus’ words as if they’re the *only* true and trustworthy words which nourish, equip, challenge, comfort, and sustain hungry and weary sheep-people like you and me. In a world filled with so many attractive lies and deceptions, we need to keep listening to Jesus and trust what he says as he forgives, cleanses, and feeds his holy people
2. **Jesus knows his sheep – deeply, intimately, and personally.** In a world where we can feel so lonely and isolated because we wonder if anyone truly cares or knows us, Jesus knows (and keeps getting to know) you and me. He listens to all our prayers and knows our inner-most struggles, fears, desires, deceptions, scars, worries, sicknesses, and doubts. And even though he knows how much we’ve sinned against him and let many people down, he still loves us!
3. **There’s a unity of purpose, direction, and companionship between Jesus and his sheep.** His sheep desire to keep following Jesus. So, even though there’s so many other distractions and attractions which might tempt us away from following Jesus, Jesus’ sheep (who keep listening to Jesus and are intimately known by Jesus) can’t help but follow in his footsteps. Listening and knowing and following all go hand in hand and can’t be separated. We can’t do one and opt out of the others.
4. **As a result, Jesus’ sheep receive a deep, lasting life.** This doesn’t mean we’ll have a trouble-free life without health or relationship troubles, or that we won’t experience failure or times of difficulty. But it does mean that even when we experience times when the valley of the shadow of death looms over us and threaten us, we’re still secure in our relationship with our Good Shepherd who continues to speak his words of comfort and peace, who continues to welcome us at his holy table, and who continues to promise us forgiveness, cleansing, and eternal life.
5. **Do you know that you and I, as Jesus’ precious and dearly loved sheep who keep listening to him, will never perish?** Sure, our skin and bones

will one day shrivel and rot away in our graves, but you and I will never perish! After all, we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Therefore, even when death seems inevitable (which it is), we need to remember these words were spoken by the same Saviour who conquered death, rose again in bodily form, and still lives eternally. As people who follow Jesus, we confidently follow him through death into eternal life. That's where we belong and have our future!

6. **This means death can't get a firm grip on us.** Even Satan can't keep hold of us. Instead, we're held securely in the eternal grip of Jesus Christ who already stands on the eternal side of life in his everlasting kingdom. This means you and I belong, body and soul, where Jesus belongs, and he won't let us go.

These two simple verses are full of comfort and promise for all those who are Jesus' listening and following sheep, including you and me.

But there's one more surprise in Jesus' words. He goes on to say: "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." John 10:29

This gives us the confidence that not only does Jesus have a secure grip on you and me, but so does the Father, who is greater than all.

But this isn't the only way this verse has been translated. This doesn't mean it's wrong (in fact, the alternate translation is often indicated in the footnotes), but it needs to be carefully considered.

You see, the alternate translation says: "What my Father has given me is more important than anything, and no one can snatch it from the Father's hand." John 10:29 ISV

If we consider this to be true, we need to consider: What is this *thing* the Father has given Jesus which is more important than anything?

Well, it's his flock of holy sheep – it's you and me!

What's more important than anything, and therefore worth the price of Jesus' sacrificial blood? It's the holy people of God who keep listening to his voice, who are known intimately by Jesus, who keep following Jesus, who receive a deep and lasting life, who won't perish, and can never be taken out of his hand – they're the important thing worth the blood of Jesus!

This means, you and I, as members of the holy flock of God, are more important to God than anything else! This holy huddle of flawed and imperfect sheep, who are part of God's precious and valuable flock (along with all the other holy huddles of

flawed and imperfect sheep across the world which make up the one true Church) is more important to God than anything else!

As Jesus walks around the Temple in Jerusalem at the time when his people celebrate its renewal and re-dedication, he speaks about the precious and dearly loved sheep of God – a living temple of holy sheep-people – who are constantly being renewed and rededicated as we keep listening to his holy Word and responding with trusting faith.

Jesus continues to walk among us today and continues to speak to his precious flock. This means we're not to neglect hearing what he says, after all, his sheep keep listening to him and want to be where Jesus says he promises to be, including at his banqueting table. His listening sheep keep rejoicing as we hear God's forgiveness. His listening sheep are constantly comforted by his promises of love and faithfulness. His listening sheep continue to be assured of his promises of life with him in his eternal kingdom.

As dearly loved members of his holy flock, let's continue to listen to him and keep on receiving the heavenly comforts of forgiveness, life, and peace that he offers.

*And it's in this way the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

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South Burnett Lutheran Parish  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
11<sup>th</sup> May 2025