

John 10:22-30

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

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

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

Dear Believer

Once upon a time, for some of you quite some time ago, for others, not nearly so long ago, you were given a name. Most of us have a first, a middle, and a last name. Sometimes it seems as though your parents only gave you a middle name so that there would be an extra handle in there to use when they really, really needed to get your attention.

Other than parents expressing vexation at your antics, there are only a few times in life that your whole name seems to be used. Jesus knows you by name—your *whole* name, including the name Christian. *He* calls you by name. I can't mention you each by full name today—it would take too long—so I'll simply mention that Jesus says to each one of us: "Dear believer."

See what Jesus says in today's gospel? "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27, EHV). Notice in his words what Jesus does *not* say: "They *heard* my voice." Rather than using the past tense, Jesus uses the present tense. He does so for a reason. Hearing Jesus' voice wasn't just something you and I, as Jesus' sheep, did at one time, it is an active thing. Jesus' sheep hear his voice *now*, today.

"I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life" (John 10:27-28, EHV). Jesus does not say that he *once* knew you, but that he continues to know you, nor that you *once* followed him, but that isn't necessary any longer. Present tense. It's always present tense and it always will be. "I give them eternal life." *That* is *never* past tense. Your relationship with Jesus is now and always will be.

One of those times when you were called by your whole name was when the Lord Jesus called you in baptism. Most of us don't remember hearing his voice at that time because we were babies, but you *did* hear. Your ears heard, but especially your heart heard when the Holy Spirit caused you to believe in Jesus as your Savior.

"My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27, EHV). That's really what it means to hear Jesus' voice—to believe that he is the One who protects you and forgives you. He is the One who laid down his life for you—like a shepherd.

Hearing Jesus' voice happens again and again. Baptism isn't just a once and done kind of thing. Jesus speaks to you every day through your baptism, reminding you that you are his—that you are forgiven. Listen to him speak to you by remembering your baptism every day.

Hearing Jesus' voice happens every day as you read and study his Word—the Bible. It

will never go out of style, it will never go out of print. You hear Jesus' voice in the worship service, when the pastor speaks the absolution, or forgiveness, of sins: "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." When you listen to a sermon and receive the Lord's Supper, it is the voice of Jesus' speaking through the words and speaking through his own body and blood, in, with, and under the bread and the wine, coming to you and reminding you of his forgiveness.

Jesus knows every need you have and every feeling you have. He knows your doubts and your fears. He knows the reasons for your excitement and your sadness. He knows the plans he has for you in your future. The Apostle Paul reminds: "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, EHV). The Good Shepherd guards and guides you every day so that even when things don't seem to be going well in your life, you can remember the promise that he is there with you and will work even bad things for your good.

"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27, EHV). Often we *don't* do such a good job of following him. We stray into sin constantly. You can come up with plenty of examples of ways in which you have *failed* to follow your Shepherd. But Jesus died for you for times just such as these—times when you wander away. He died to wash your sins away by his own blood, so that he might constantly renew you as one of his sheep.

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29, EHV). Jesus gives you eternal life. His promise is ongoing. No matter what has happened to you or will happen to you, nobody can take you away from Jesus. The Lord Jesus and his Heavenly Father promise they will protect you from anyone and everyone that would pull you away from him.

The only one who can cause you to lose your salvation is yourself. That's the reason the Good Shepherd will keep on speaking to you. When he speaks to you he tells you, again and again, "I laid down my life for you. I have taken it up again to give you eternal life. You are my sheep."

Listen to his voice as he calls to you: "Dear believer." Amen.