

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Sunday, May 8, 2022, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA.

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector Scripture: John 10:22-30

"Stop Talking and Listen"

We find Jesus in today's Holy Gospel, walking in the "Portico of Solomon" of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was a cold winter's day, and it was Hanukah. You might be saying – 'Hanukah is in the Bible?' Yes! Jesus was walking in the part of the temple that was enclosed and sheltered Him from the cold east wind. As He walked, prayed, and meditated, a group of Jews came to Him and asked Him, "*How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*" (John 10:24) In other words they wanted to know – are you the Messiah or not? These people are desperately longing for someone to save them from the horrible conditions in which they live – under Rome's thumb. They cannot help but remember the feast that they are celebrating – the Feast of Dedication, which is also known as the Feast of the Maccabees – or Hanukah, reminding them of the rededication of the Temple after it had been horribly desecrated during the terrible persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes, emperor of the Greco Syrian Empire in 168 BC. It wasn't all that many years before and the memory was still real. These people need a deliverer and Savior and they want him now, and so they ask Jesus to tell them who He really is.

Jesus answered them, "*I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles that I do in my Father's name, speak for Me; but you do not believe, because you are not My sheep. My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.*" Right there in front of them is the Christ, the Messiah – and they are just not getting it. Jesus even tells the Jews right out that He is the Christ, the Messiah. He tells them that He has already told them over and over again who He is, but they just will not believe. He speaks, but they do not hear.

Isn't it remarkable how times have changed as far as listening goes? Now we have homes, cars, and devices that listen to your commands to turn on lights, turn on air conditioning or heat, and even change your TV channels or even music. This did not come about by chance, but by a lot of hard work as well as testing and training. It really all started when customers wanted to call a company to find out an outstanding balance on their account or simply to talk to a customer service representative. Don't you find it the hardest thing to get to a customer service representative? It is built that way. The savings turned out to be tremendous by using technology to give information and even have the technology ask questions – because it would only cost pennies to provide this information on the phone, rather than connect to a person – who receives a salary and benefits. AT&T Bell Labs, the company that invented the transistor, started in the development of this speech recognition and even text to speech in telephone technology – providing this to companies to save a lot of money on every call. I was privileged to be a part of the enhancement of development of the machines and software that make this happen. I became a part of a remarkable team, who truly pushed the envelope using this cutting-edge technology on every single phone call to AT&T Universal Card in Jacksonville, Fl. Being teamed with some of the most gifted and talented people – we used speech technology to be very cost effective as well as informative. I am just amazed, having left there in 2002, at how

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the usage of this technology has now grown and it surrounds us in our everyday life. Think about your home, your car, your TV. The usage has grown and it surrounds us in our everyday life. It is always listening and always ready to hear. Be careful what you say and where you say it.

Our Lord Jesus wants us to hear His words and understand who He is in our lives. He wants us to know and believe that He is our Shepherd and we are His sheep. He really wants us to follow His voice, to hear His words of peace and comfort for our lives. But sadly, sometimes you and I have a difficult time hearing, and the remarkable technology will not help us. We have to listen to Him. We need to stop talking and listen to hear His voice and follow it in this world. Though we might have a difficult time hearing His voice and though there are times as if it might “seem” that we are hard of hearing to His voice, Jesus is reminding us that He wants to be patient with us, giving us a bond of trust and understanding between us and Him, so that we can hear His voice, and that we can trust in Him so that we will know He wants what is best for us.

In this modern world we can too easily be distracted. Maybe it is not that we are hard of hearing to the words of Jesus, with a hearing problem as much as we hear what we want to hear. Could it be that a part of our problem is that we don't have a trusting relationship with Him to listen intently to His words. We only listen to what we want to listen to, that goes with husbands and wives and children, and far too much of our listening is centered on the world and not on Jesus. We tune Him out instead of focusing our attention on Him.

Today is Mother's Day. I find it so amazing to see how babies react when they hear their mother's voice. It is like no one else. When they hear her their face lights up, even from across the room. They react like we should when Jesus speaks to us. Many times, we only need to stop talking and to listen to Him. These Jews heard Jesus, but did not believe. They saw Jesus' signs, but did not get His message. People have heard His words down through the centuries through the Bible, through preaching, through the sacrament, that Jesus Christ is the risen Lord, the Messiah. They have seen His deeds as His Holy Spirit has worked in the lives of countless people, but still some don't believe, still some have a difficult time centering their attention, their focus on this Shepherd who would guide the lives of His sheep. How blessed we are to have an advantage over the Jews of Jesus' time, because we have the whole story! From the Alpha to the Omega we can see in all of the Holy Scriptures the witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In each of the last three Sundays, we have seen a powerful witness that without a doubt, Jesus has risen from the dead. So we should be able to trust in Him, to follow Him, to believe in His Lordship for our lives with greater conviction than those who approached Jesus in the temple. Sadly, many people still doubt, many people still do not trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Many people are still looking, still searching for meaning and purpose to their lives. Many have found no one to help them with the burdens they carry. They are still wandering in life, without any direction, without a goal, and no idea what to make of their life, and what they want to accomplish with the God given gifts that have been so generously given

by God.

The key to hearing His voice is that we need to let Jesus have control. We need to give Him permission in our life; surrender to Him so that He can be your Good Shepherd; so that He can take care of you by giving you guidance, giving you peace, and giving you a sense of worth and direction for your life. We will follow a GPS wherever it tells us to go. Have you ever been following a GPS in your car and it tells you to make a right-hand turn and you find yourself at a dead end – and it wants you to cross a river but there is no road there? Satellites are good but they don't tell you everything. We need to understand that God does not make mistakes. Look around this room – there is not one mistake in this room – please understand that. God loves you and He sees you and He loves you anyway! That is how special you are.

The reaction by the Jews in the Temple was certainly not one of recognition, or of welcoming, or even acceptance, but instead, as the Gospel of John tells us in the words immediately following today's reading – *“The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?”* (John 10:31-32)

What about the many people on the face of this earth that have not heard the voice of Jesus or, God forgive them, have outwardly rejected His message, and even rejected Him personally? Jesus does tell us of His intentions toward them just moments before today's Gospel as He reveals His plan for the world, saying *“I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.”* (John 10:14-16) Jesus' plan of salvation is not just the people of Israel but for the Gentiles as well – He says, *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”* (Mark 7:16) Jesus' invitation is to the whole world – but sadly there will be those who refuse – who pick up the stones to hurl. Please pray for them – pray that their hearts would be changed – that their ears would be opened – and that they would open the doors of their hearts to Christ. It is a matter of life and death – their eternal life and death!

Jesus went to the cross so that each one of us may have forgiveness of our sins, so that each one of us can, in spite of our unworthiness, seek Him and invite Him into our hearts and lives. Today is the perfect day, and now is the perfect time, to begin a relationship with Jesus as Lord of your life, as your Good Shepherd. Please give Him permission today and receive recognition of His voice. Jesus says, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”* (John 10:27-28)

So I ask you: do you have ears to hear Him in your life? Are you listening? Or are you doing all the talking?