



St John Lutheran Church

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JOHN. 10: 22-30

Christ's loving hands

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me...And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

In today's Gospel the Jewish leaders once again signaled their desire to murder Jesus. **It is tempting** to think that the Jews were simply and ignorantly defending God's honor against Jesus' claim that, v. 30, **"I and My Father are one."** **But no... their** later charge of blasphemy against Jesus was only a pious pretext for their plan to murder the very Son of God. **And so, it** is beneficial for us to inquire about their real motive which is fear. **"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"** (Heb. 10: 31). **And this fear** of the Jews was their motive in the murder of God as they crucified Jesus Christ.

And so we look at the context of Jesus' words... **"My sheep hear My voice"** and **"neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."** **St. John** tells us that Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah. **As the name** of the feast implies... **Israel celebrated** the dedication of the altar of God.

Before the birth of Jesus and before the Roman conquest... **the Jews** were a nation occupied by the Syrians. **The religion of** Israel was mocked by those who would not adopt the Greek openness of multiculturalism which came through of the influence of Alexander the Great... **and so, the Jews were persecuted relentlessly.**

The high mark of this insult and persecution was the desecration of Jerusalem's Temple and altar... **making of it an "abomination of desolation."** **Judas Maccabeus** and his guerrilla army fought the Syrian rulers and finally prevailed and took possession of the Temple in 164 BC **The Temple was** cleansed and a new altar was built. **During an eight** day celebration the new altar was dedicated for its holy and sacred purpose.

As the church today has a yearly cycle of seasons, feasts, and accompanying readings from Scripture... **so also** Old Testament Israel possessed a liturgical calendar. **During the Feast of** Dedication the chosen Scripture for the rabbis' daily preaching was the thirty-fourth chapter of the prophet Ezekiel. **As we allow** God's Word from this Old Testament prophet to inform the Words Jesus spoke to the Jews... **perhaps we** can appreciate the murderous fear in the hearts of the Jews who confronted Jesus with the disingenuous question, v. 24, **"How long will You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."**

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St. John tells us that Jesus walked in that part of the temple known as Solomon's porch. **This was the** outer most part of the Temple constructed of magnificent and covered colonnades, closed to the outside but open on the inside. **The effect was** of multiple cloisters where the people gathered and the rabbis taught and preached from God's Word. **And so we** have a pretty good idea on what Jesus preached as **he "walked in the Temple at Solomon's porch"** during the Feast of Dedication. **Jesus would have** preached the fulfillment of God's Word as recorded in Ezekiel 34... **that in** their midst **He is the Shepherd of Israel, God Almighty.**

Against the shepherds in His place... **that is,** against the Jews teaching falsely God, said, Ezek. 34: 2, **"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Woe to the shepherds who do not feed the flock, who fail to strengthen the weak, bind up the broken, and cause the sheep to be scattered by the force and cruelty of their rule. Of these under-shepherds God said, v. 10, "Behold, I AM against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand."**

No man but Jesus is adequate **or competent** to be Shepherd of God's flock... **and still** He continues to call men of limited abilities into His flock ... **to stand** in His place and stand...**all for** the sake of the Gospel. **I know that** many of you regularly pray for me. **A text such** as from Ezekiel moves me to thank you profoundly for your love... **and I** dare to impose on you for redoubled prayers... **that I** may be strengthened to the Glory of God among you. **As many of** you well know...**this Text** from Ezekiel is constantly on my mind as I serve here in the Holy Office you called me to.

The Shepherd, of whom Ezekiel speaks, is not some **"goody two-shoes"** in sandals. **This Shepherd not** only tirelessly feeds and cares for His flock... **He requires** an accounting of His sheep and He judges what is said and done by those who occupy His Office of pastor to the people. **So you see** the circumstance of the Jews in today's Gospel text. **As Jesus preached** that He is the True Shepherd of Israel... **the Jews** heard this... **not as good news... but** their own condemnation.

They did not possess ears to hear the Gospel of God in Christ nor would they have been particularly interested in such good news of God's mercy.

What the Jews desired was a continuation of the status quo... **they wanted to continue to feed** themselves at the expense of the people and to rule over them in the authority they possessed as the representatives of God's Law...to these false teachers and false prophets God says: **"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves."**

It is truly "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Please keep this image of fear in mind **because the** Jews appropriately feared Jesus... **He told** them straight-out, in the words of Ezekiel, v. 11, **"For thus says the Lord God: Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out."**

Jesus' flock had been scattered... **starved... wounded ...and abused** by the ministry of the Jews... **and in** Jesus... **God now** had come in the flesh to personally gather and redeem His flock... **in His** own Words He say that He is here **"to preach the Gospel to the poor... to heal the broken**

hearted... to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4: 18, 19).

What were the Jews to do? Everywhere Jesus appeared the crowds grew as His flock was being gathered. The Jews admitted as much. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, they said, Jn. 11: 48, "if we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." And as Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph... the Pharisees complained, "Look the world has gone after Him" (Jn. 12: 19).

The charge of blasphemy by the Jews against Jesus was just a pious front to mask their fear and hatred for the true Shepherd of Israel. Jesus puts the Truth to their motivation in the parable of the wicked vinedressers who "reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours" (Lk. 20: 14).

It is indeed "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" ... and so the Jews for fear of God purposed to kill him. With premeditation and malice aforethought they murdered their God in the flesh! But it is precisely by this murderous death whereby Jesus comes to His flock as the Good Shepherd. God in Christ gave Himself into the hands of men... that in dying and rising... His flock would hear His voice and the love of God for sinful men. It is because of His great love that God's flock would not fear to be held in God's hands... hands imprinted with fearful wounds...hands that were held in place because spikes were driven through them! The hands of man and his sin brought this on...the fear of being held in the hands of a righteous and holy God remained very real until our Lord's scarred hands reached out to save us!

Thomas said to the Apostles, Jn. 20: 25, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails. I will not believe." To this blatant unbelief Jesus seeks out and redeems one lone and frightened sheep that the Father had given Him. Jesus appears again to His gathered Apostles and invites Thomas to fall into His hands, v. 27, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands. Do not be unbelieving but believing."

Jesus is our Good Shepherd because He does the Will of the Father... He goes on seeking and gathering the lost. First... Jesus calls us by His Word... explaining, "My sheep hear My voice." A sheep of Jesus' flock is one... who moved by the Spirit... keeps the Word he or she hears by believing it. And this is why Jesus also says of His sheep; "neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." Jesus' sheep are they who have come into the possession of the pierced hands of their Shepherd. Does that mean that we possess Jesus... or that Jesus possesses us? Yes!

When Jesus as a shepherd feeds His flock... it is always with His Word and it is always by His Holy hands. When Jesus speaks His Gospel of the forgiveness of your sins on account of His death and resurrection... we hear His voice. When Jesus bids us, "take, eat," His Body and Blood... our Shepherd by His pierced and wounded hands...ushers us into the precincts of Heaven itself... and we like Thomas are invited ...not to fall into the fearful hands of the living God... but to fall into the loving and scarred hands of our Lord Jesus... and there abide by faith...as no one can take us out of those Almighty hands!

In Isaiah the forty-ninth chapter, God says, v. 16, "See I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before Me." And so ...in the wounds of Christ do we "dwell in the house of the Lord forever." In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen.

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