

John 10:22-30:

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 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. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.'

A terrible storm came into a town and local officials sent out an emergency warning that the riverbanks would soon overflow and flood the nearby homes. They ordered everyone in the town to evacuate immediately.

A faithful Christian man heard the warning and decided to stay, saying to himself, "I will trust God and if I am in danger, then God will send a divine miracle to save me."

The neighbors came by his house and said to him, "We're leaving and there is room for you in our car, please come with us!" But the man declined. "I have faith that God will save me."

As the man stood on his porch watching the water rise up the steps, a woman in a canoe paddled by and called to him, "Hurry and come into my canoe, the waters are rising quickly!" But the man again said, "No thanks, God will save me."

The floodwaters rose higher pouring water into his living room and the man had to retreat to the second floor. A police motorboat came by and saw him at the window. "We will come up and rescue you!" they shouted. But the man refused, waving them off saying, "Use your time to save someone else! I have faith that God will save me!"

The flood waters rose higher and higher and the man had to climb up to his rooftop.

A helicopter spotted him and dropped a rope ladder. A rescue officer came down the ladder and pleaded with the man, "Grab my hand and I will pull you up!" But the man STILL refused, folding his arms tightly to his body. "No thank you! God will save me!"

Shortly after, the house broke up and the floodwaters swept the man away and he drowned.

When in Heaven, the man stood before God and asked, "I put all of my faith in you. Why didn't you come and save me?"

And God said, "I sent you a warning. I sent you a car. I sent you a canoe. I sent you a motorboat. I sent you a helicopter. What more were you looking for?"

In the gospel passage today, the questioners ask Jesus if he is indeed the Messiah, and for how long he will keep them in suspense, to just tell them plainly. Jesus responds that he has told them, and they don't believe.

Now up to this place in the book of John, the only one Jesus has actually point-blank plainly told that he is the Messiah is the Samaritan woman at the well. In our passage today, Jesus says that it is his works that testify to who he is. He implies that this should be plain enough. He has turned water into wine, healed the sick, the dying, the paralyzed and the blind, with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish he has fed over 5,000 people. And yet still, some want to know plainly.

Are we not like these questioners, like the man in the flood? What will it take for us to see, to hear, how God is speaking to us, calling to us? It's not always so clear and plain.

My path to this pulpit was one of resistance and doubt. Looking back, I can see that God was nudging me, beckoning me, and I usually pretended not to notice or dismissed the signs as foolish. Well, God is patient. And often subtle. When I was resisting over and over again a call from God to stop teaching music because of something else God was calling me to, that to which I didn't yet know, I remember one day in the middle of my resistance running into a neighbor on the path behind my house. Hey, Stephanie, he said, we just got a piano! Will you teach our kids? My mind said, "Sure, why not, they live next door, how easy would that be?" denying the promise I had made to God to make room for the new thing God had planned for me.

"Yes," I said to my neighbor, give me a call with some good times that work for you." As soon as I said it, I felt as if someone had punched me in the stomach. Now I don't believe in a violent God, but I do believe that my body is one way that God gives me signs. It is one avenue that God uses to speak to me. I decided that I had to listen to and trust God, over my intellect that insisted that saying no to my neighbors did not make sense. Hearing and following God is not a rational endeavor. Faith is not a rational endeavor. It is not something we can will ourselves into or convince ourselves of through rationalization, facts and proof. Faith is an experience. It is a real and true experience that we must trust. I could no longer contradict what my body was telling me when I was clearly going against God's will for me. So I called my neighbor with regret, and offered a referral for a music teacher. It made no sense. It was a difficult summer, closing down my music business and waiting to find out what it was that God was calling me to.

Jesus says that the questioners don't believe, because they don't belong to his sheep. "My sheep hear my voice," he says, "I know them, and they follow me." The inclusive Jesus is not talking about a specific group of people that are closed off and others

that are automatically in. It is about experiencing him and his works, being in relationship with him and God.

A child in the womb grows accustomed to hearing the mother's voice for nine months, and recognizes the voice once born, and follows that voice. Similarly, the sheep know and trust the shepherd, not because they have gone through any sort of rational intellectual discernment, but because they have experienced the shepherd and his good works.

From my personal experience, I have found that it is not when we are at our best and most confident that we notice God's grace, though it can certainly happen that way (as the cover quote expresses: God is wherever we allow God to enter). It seems, though, it is when we are lost, hopeless, scared, out of options, desperate, grieving and powerless... it is often when we fall to our knees and cry out for help that we are more open to experiencing God's grace. When things are going along just fine, who needs a Savior, who needs a sign? Perhaps this is why the questioners couldn't see Jesus for who he was. They didn't think they were in need of a Savior, or, at least, the kind of Savior that Jesus was. The kind who gives eternal life, and offers the hand of peace, that once held can never be snatched away.

The world tells us that success is when we have it all put-together and can accomplish everything ourselves; but spiritual success is when we are in need of God and thus seek to partner with God. It is when we are humble and on our knees that we remember whose we are, that we are not the ones in control. When we ask for help, God guides us, and the way God shows us is to help others, as Jesus showed throughout his life, even as he hung on a cross. He was still concerned for those suffering around him, even as he hung there, thirsty, sweaty, bloody, dying.

Jesus is saying in our passage today, listen to my voice, follow me, and you will have eternal life, which is a quality of life that takes on new richness and meaning, like the place described in Psalm 23: green pastures, still waters, restoration, right paths, freedom from fear, comfort, a full table, anointing, a cup overflowing, goodness, mercy, dwelling forever in the house of the Lord, a security that cannot be taken away. Jesus is saying, put your faith in God, walk in God's ways, and no person or agency can snatch that peace from you. Trust in God, and God's ways. As Christians, we follow Jesus' voice, which we believe is the voice of God. This voice tells us what the Jewish Scriptures tell us: to seek justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with our God; to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves.

We are tempted to resist God's works, expecting something different, like the man in the flood, like many people in Jesus' time who were expecting a Savior, a Messiah that would free them from Roman rule, not someone that would be hung on a cross as a criminal. The man on the rooftop didn't take the rope offered by the person in the helicopter. Some see the man hanging on the cross and consider that the end... they never bother to check out the empty tomb. If the man on the roof had taken

hold of the rope, he would have experienced and participated in God's work. If he had heard the neighbor offering the spot in the car or the police offering a ride in the boat as God's voice, he would have seen that God speaks to us in a variety of ways and often not the way we are expecting. Perhaps we are expecting the extraordinary, and God shows up as ordinary – a neighbor, a rock rolled away, exposing an empty tomb. What's so extraordinary about a vacant cave unless we've experienced the backstory?

Jesus says at the end of the passage that he is one with God. The Greek adjective "one" is neuter, not masculine here– thus, scholars reveal that Jesus is not saying that he and Father are one person, nor even one nature or essence. Rather, he and God are united in the work that they do. It is impossible to distinguish Jesus' work from God's work, because Jesus shares fully in God's work. He hears God through the Scriptures and follows God through his actions. He does this through kindness, mercy, justice, hospitality, love, forgiveness. It is a daily practice, being in relationship with God. Jesus does the works of the Father. And we, as Christians, do the works of Jesus. To what or whom is God calling you today? Will you listen, and will you respond? Will you hear, and will you follow? Grab God's hand, and don't let go.