



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 12, 2019

“The Audacious Claims of Jesus”

(John 10:22-30)

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**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Jesus was at the Temple of Jerusalem, the very epicenter of Judaism. He was walking in Solomon's colonnade. Picture a massive sheltered porch adjacent to the east side of the temple. It had a row of columns that were 27 feet tall, supporting a cedar roof. It was a popular place for rabbis and their disciples to gather.

Rather suddenly, a group of men have surrounded Jesus. It's not a friendly crowd, and they've encircled him. Maybe they listen to him for a bit, but then they get down to business. "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." It's a trap, actually. If he says he's not the Messiah, that would be a lie and it would undermine the very purpose for which he was born. If he says, "Yes, I am the Christ," right then and there they could drag him out of the city and stone him for blasphemy.

So, they've got him right where they want him, and Jesus says exactly what they want to hear. He makes an audacious claim. It comes in the last verse of our text: "I and the Father are one." That is, he is one with God. He has a personal union with the One who created the heavens and the earth, personal union with the One who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Imagine, right there in the temple of Jerusalem, he says, "I and the Father are one."

That's all they need to hear. They've got him, clean, neat and tidy. This is a man purporting to be God. Such a person is either dangerous or crazy, and in that era deserving of death. In the very next verse (v. 31) that's why they start picking up stones with which to kill Jesus. They weren't able to pull it off just then; maybe the crowd of Jesus' followers is too large. But later, they would use these words against him.

Remember when they were demanding that Pilate crucify Jesus? “Take him yourselves and crucify him” Pilate said. “I find no guilt in him.” To which they responded, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because *he has made himself the Son of God.*” So yes, they heard this claim loud and clear and remembered it, and used it against him before Pilate. That time it worked. That time they got their way. That is, this claim of Jesus to be one with the Father is part of what got him crucified.

Today, 2000 years later, it’s quite possible to lose touch with the magnitude of the claim Jesus is making . . . in a couple of ways. First, for those who have been Christians for a long time, we can think of him as so much our friend, our brother, our gentle shepherd and teacher, that we forget he’s also Almighty God, whose voice can rattle the mountains. We can speak of him as if we know all his thoughts, what he would do and say in every circumstance. We can be so chummy with him, so comfortable in his holy presence that we lose all sense of reverence and awe and fear. We might as well just have him in our hip pockets.

“I and the Father are one.” There’s another way we can lose touch with the magnitude of this claim, and this one is more common for folks with little or no faith. Ask them who Jesus is and many will go on and on about what a good man he was, a prophet, a teacher, a pacifist, an advocate of social justice. They’ll go on and on, but they’ll stop short of saying Jesus is God’s Son, one with the Father. They don’t buy that for one moment, any more than that hostile crowd did at Solomon’s colonnade. They deny the claim Jesus is making here.

But here’s the thing: Jesus doesn’t give us permission to dismiss him as a good teacher. He’s claiming here to be God. If that’s not true, he’d either be a lunatic or a liar, but he would not be a good teacher. In John 3:16, Jesus says, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.” Two verses later he says, “But whoever does not believe is condemned already.” Anyone who says something like that is either Lord, lunatic or liar, but you

can't just call him a good teacher. Love him or hate him, but patronize him.

I suspect some are here today only because it's Mother's Day. You were compelled, by invisible yet irresistible forces. And there may be some here today who have never been so sure about all this religious stuff, and have many doubts about Jesus. I understand. But friends, the magnitude of Jesus' claims mean that you better not just *doubt* that he's not God. You'd better *know* he's not God, because there's way too much on the line. His claims are that audacious, their magnitude that great.

Others have made similar claims as Jesus, but have never been able to garnish much of a following. Jesus is different. He made incredible claims, and backed them up with incredible miracles. Not magic: miracles. His miracles added credence and credibility to his claims. In verse 25 Jesus says, "The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me." Specifically, the fact that he rose from the dead bears witness to his nature as God's Son.

Kenneth Scott Latourette was a professor of ancient history at Yale. He wrote, "Why among all the cults and philosophies competing in the Greco Roman world, why did Christianity succeed and outstrip all others? Why did it succeed despite getting more opposition than any others? Why did it succeed though it had no influential backers in high places, but consisted mostly of the poor and slaves? How did it succeed so completely that it forced the most powerful state in history to come to terms with it and then outlived the very empire that sought to destroy it? It is clear, that at the very beginning of Christianity there must have occurred a vast release of energy, perhaps unequal in our history. Without it, the course of the Christian religion is inexplicable." That vast release of energy, of course, was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Romans 1, "He was declared [by the crowds] to be the Son of God . . . by his resurrection from the dead" (v. 4).

That day in the Temple Courts, his opponents heard the claim and decided he was crazy and dangerous. The fact

that he rose from the dead (as he said he would) confirms he's not crazy. (Dangerous, on the other hand, still applies – especially for those who do not believe.)

In our text Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” That’s a big, audacious claim. But there’s another audacious claim in this text having to do with his relationship with you and me.

To his opponents, Jesus said, “You do not believe because you are not part of my flock.” Not my flock. They had no idea how devastating those words were, no idea of the consequences of their unbelief. It’s not a decision he’s making about them, or a judgment he’s making of them. It was their judgment of him. You do not believe; you are not part of my flock.

Those may be the most distressing words in all Scripture. They are followed with some of the sweetest. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand.” There’s so much here, but today, I’d like to focus on just that one sentence: “I give my sheep eternal life.”

Beginning with that word I. Jesus has the authority to give eternal life because, as he said, “I and the Father are one.” He has the authority also because he won eternal life for us on the cross. It is an audacious claim, but a little later, he makes the same claim in a different way: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by me” (v. 6). He is the Way. There is none other. The amassing of good works will not sway God one way or the other. It’s by grace we are saved through faith, not works (Eph. 2:8).

That’s why the next word he uses is “give.” “I give my sheep eternal life.” A gift is free. It’s something someone else paid for. Jesus alone paid for this gift of eternal life on the cross. “The wages of sin is death.” He paid those wages. He paid the cost of your redemption, not with gold or silver but with his innocent suffering and death.

I give them eternal life. He says the same thing

differently in John 11, but it's just as audacious: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn. 11:25). You know, there are still people running around who like to smile at you that all-knowing smile and say, "You know, Jesus never claimed to be God." They think themselves wise. They're fools. They do not know Scripture.

"I give them eternal life; I and the Father are one." This means when we die, death does not have the last word. Jesus does. It means when we die, he changes our lives; but does not end them. It means communion; not oblivion.

This is not reincarnation he's talking about, another temporal life that will end in sickness and death, which has nothing at all to do with Scripture. This is resurrection he's talking about, unending life. Job saw this coming, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:25-26). We will rise again in the flesh as living, breathing human beings, never again to get sick, never again to have knees and hips and shoulders that wear out, never again to die. Isaiah 40: "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" (v. 31). John also wonderfully describes it in our Epistle lesson, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

It's all part of this promise: "I give them eternal life."

One last thing: this is a gift that already belongs to you. I know this because of another audacious claim of Jesus. John 3:36: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." Present tense. Remember, God does not need to wait until the end of our lives to tally our works and see if we've

done enough. Not at all! Because we are saved by grace through faith, he can say, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” We can know the same and be assured of it.

In so small a space, Jesus makes two great big, audacious claims. The first: “I and the Father are one.” And the other: “I give my sheep eternal life.” Thanks be to God. Amen.

