

At first glance, our Gospel lesson today seems out of place. This story takes place before the events of Passiontide, before Jesus' death on the cross, before His resurrection. As a matter of fact, the events in this story lead up to what has been happening during the past few weeks. So why have the clever people who devise the Lectionary put this passage here?

The last three Sundays we've been looking at Gospel stories that tell us Jesus is risen. We've seen how Mary, Peter and John went to the tomb, and how Jesus spoke to Mary.

We've seen Him appear to the disciples and to Thomas in the upper room, we've seen Jesus appear to the disciples as He made them breakfast on the shore of the lake. The last three Sundays, we've seen that Jesus is indeed risen. We know that the promise He made, that in three days He would rise again, has come true.

So why is this story, here?

It's because in this passage, we hear Jesus declare that He and His Father are one. Our text begins as Jesus is walking in the portico of Solomon in the temple in Jerusalem. 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 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."

Jesus tells the Jews that He is the Christ, the Messiah. He tells them that He has told them over and over again who He is, but they will not believe. He speaks, but they don't hear.

He wants them to, but they just don't get it.

Jesus also wants us to hear His words;  
He wants us to understand who He is for our lives.  
He wants us to know that He is our shepherd and we are His sheep.  
He wants us to follow His voice;  
He wants us to hear his words of peace and comfort for our lives.  
But sometimes we have a difficult time hearing.

One of the consequences of the resurrection that is pointed out in this text, one of the things Jesus is asking us to understand about the risen Christ, is that we need to hear His voice and follow it in this world; although it seems that sometimes we have a difficult time doing that. It's as though we're deaf, unwilling or unable to listen. But Jesus reminds us that He is patient with us. He wants a bond of trust and understanding between us so that we can hear His voice.

Maybe we're just too easily distracted in the rush of this modern world. Maybe we aren't deaf to the words of Jesus, maybe we don't have a hearing problem, it's just that we only hear what we want to hear. I'm sorely tempted to talk about husbands at this point, but I won't!

Our not hearing could be a sign that what we do is tune out Jesus and tune in on all the other sounds and words of the world as it rushes by. And maybe this shows that far too much of our listening is centred on the world and not on Jesus.

The Jews heard, but they didn't believe.  
They saw Jesus' signs, but they didn't get the message.  
We've heard His words down through the centuries through the Bible, through preaching, through the sacrament, words that tell us that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the risen Lord.

We have seen His deeds as God's Holy Spirit has worked in the lives of countless people, but still some don't quite believe, and we still have a difficult time centring our attention, our focus, on the shepherd who wants to guide our lives.

Now in one way we have an advantage over the Jews of Jesus' time, because we have the whole story. We have seen in the scripture the witness to the resurrection. We have heard these last three Sundays that Jesus is risen. So we should be able to trust in Him, to follow Him, to believe in His Lordship for our lives with greater conviction that the Jews who approached Jesus in the temple.

But sadly, many people still doubt, many still don't trust Jesus as their Saviour.

Many 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. Many are still wandering aimlessly, with no direction, no goal, no idea what to make of their life, what they want to accomplish with the God given gifts that have so generously been given to them.

And this, I believe, is because they don't have Jesus as their shepherd, as the One who gently guides, who is concerned for their wellbeing, who wants them to have a sense of self-worth and direction. Which leads us on to a question - how do we achieve this knowledge of Jesus as our shepherd and Saviour?

Simply by building up a relationship with God. Praying and worshipping regularly mean that when God whispers, we can be more attentive than if we never try and make contact with God.

And if we trust that God will speak to us, we are far more likely to hear, than if we don't expect to hear from Him at all.

Amen