

John 10:22-30
Baa-Ram-Ewe
August 12, 2018
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Do you remember the 1995 movie *Babe* about a pig who could herd sheep and took the perfect score at the sheep herding competition thereby capturing the hearts of a nation (both in the movie's storyline and beyond the silver screen)?

There was something unusual yet captivating about the movie premise.
There was also something that made you wonder how a movie about a pig herding sheep could tug our heart strings.

Perhaps it had something to do with the way the movie opened, closed and the story which unfolded in-between.

[first lines]

Narrator: This is a tale about an unprejudiced heart, and how it changed our valley forever. There was a time not so long ago when pigs were afforded no respect, except by other pigs; they lived their whole lives in a cruel and sunless world. In those days pigs believed that the sooner they grew large and fat, the sooner they'd be taken into Pig Paradise, a place so wonderful that no pig had ever thought to come back.

[last lines]

[9:00 a.m. – show video clip]

Narrator: And though every single human in the stands or in the commentary boxes was at a complete loss for words, the man who in his life had uttered fewer words than any of them knew exactly what to say.

Farmer Hoggett: That'll do, pig. That'll do... .

[in between lines]

Today's sermon title is taken from the opening words the pig, Babe, speaks to the sheep to get them to listen to follow his lead:

Baa-ram-ewe!

Baa-ram-ewe!

To your breed, your fleece, your clan be true!

Sheep be true!

Baa-ram-ewe!

To which, the unruly Sheep, responds: What - what did you say?

And with those words the sheep listen, and you know how it goes from there.

And, that in a nutshell, is what we (or, at least I) derive from our text in John 10 regarding the sheep and the shepherds voice.

It's a voice we know.

A voice we trust.

A voice we believe will not lose us, leave us or let us go.

It is a forever and for-always promise of God & Jesus' firm grip of grace on our lives.

As I watched that movie Babe all the way back in 1995, just one year before graduating seminary, I knew it would be used some day in a sermon – because that's what preachers do they evaluate most things by entertainment value then “preachability.”

As I re-watched that closing scene, I found myself once again with goose bumps, an unintended smile creep across my face and a small lump forming in my throat as tears crept into the corner of my eyes.

For me, the scene is a reminder that we (you and me – disciples – Christ followers) are in that sheep pen – we are the ones who will never be let go – we are the ones who upon hearing the words of life from the creator of life know our call and, in that call, we have solace and gratitude to live a full and fulfilling life.

We, like the movie's opening-lines, do not have to live our lives *in a cruel and sunless world*.

And that is life-changing!

Today's text picks up on this theme.

Jesus is walking and talking around the Temple in the portico of Solomon during the festival of Dedication (Hanukkah). The festival has been happening since 167 BCE when Judas Maccabeus reclaimed the Temple from the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes who defamed the Temple by offering sacrifice to Zeus. Hanukkah recalls, yet again, another story of God's liberation for God's people. It is a remembrance celebration by which the people thank God for having the Temple back.

Jesus strolls into this festival talking his shepherd talk.

If we read John correctly, then we must take the setting of Jesus words quite seriously.

While our text merely reads, “[They] gathered around him...” (John 10.24) – the reality of the scene is *they encircled him*.

The gravity of their question & statement, “*How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.*” (John 10.24) is they're colloquially telling Jesus **put up or shut up**. Jesus' shepherding words amid Hanukkah's celebration sparkles with irony as Israel's (and the world's) deliverer faces rejection at the festival celebrating national deliverance.

It is nothing, if not, controversial.

It is also dangerous.

Jesus speaks of a shepherd who not only promotes but can also provide abundant life AND who could show all others to be thieves who steal, kill and destroy. (John 10.10)

We know it is dangerous for if we read one verse further than this morning's text, it states, "[They] took up stones again to stone him." (John 10.31)

Into such suspense, Jesus answers *without directly answering*.

"I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me." (John 10.25)

Basically, Jesus declares if you can't hear what I'm saying then look at what I'm doing.

Does orthopraxy match my orthodoxy?

N.T. Wright says Jesus' response is a way of saying, "*If you can't draw a proper conclusion from what I'm doing will any more words help?*"

Then, Jesus goes *one step beyond* taking a further step deeper into dangerous territory declaring that *his* sheep hear, know and follow his voice. To which, Jesus promises, "*they will* never perish. No one will snatch *them* out of [his] hand. What [his] Father has given [him] is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and [Jesus] are one." (John 10.27-30)

The early church debated these words with a focus on the Father & the Son's union – focusing on how to understand the Trinity.

John's gospel wasn't interested in that dialogue – rather, this was a statement of purpose and promise regarding Jesus' mission.

Keep in mind, John's gospel is speaking to a beleaguered group of believers who have been kicked out of their faith community.

They were once a harmonious family who now they find themselves on what feels like the outside looking in. John's audience is a displaced, disinherited community of disciples who are seeking to avoid victimization.

To an honest community of faithful followers who strive to walk authentically with Christ each day, Jesus' words about unity with the Father and never being let go by Father or Son are resounding grace.

Those who see, recognize & follow the shepherd's voice will be safe – **FOREVER!**

The guarantee is the unbreakable bond between the Father & the Son AND both of their grips on that which they cherish!

It is one of John's gospel's main theme.

The sheep are both a gift and responsibility – taken seriously by the Father and the Son.

The Father and Son are on the same page.

The sheep are prized by both the Father and the Son.

It recalls for me words of a seminary friend, colleague in ministry and mentor, who oft said, "In the end it'll be all right. If it's not all right, then it's not the end."

The Greek speak here is best understood, "...they will **never-ever** perish..."

As the Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 1 reminds us, "What is [our] only comfort in life and death?"

"I **belong**, body and soul, in life and in death, not to myself but **to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ**. ... [He] **protects me so well** that without the will of my Father in heaven **not a hair can fall from my head**."

We are held in a strong grip of grace.

The Christian's future confidence is built firmly on Jesus union with the Father.

The assurance of fulfilling life – in this life and the next – depends not on us – rather it depends on Christ & God's firm (vice-like) grip on us, for, "No one will snatch [them] out of my hand..."

And, that'll do.

...

That'll do.

Amen.