

April 21, 2013

Today we will hear two beloved passages of scripture. In each we are invited to think of God and Jesus as a shepherd. For urban dwellers in the 21st century this image may not be quite as effective as it was for rural Palestinians of the 1st century. What makes for a trusted voice in our time?

Psalm 23

The use of the shepherd in this Psalm would be very familiar to the listeners. They were used commonly in Ancient Near Eastern thought to represent leaders or kings. It is believed that this Psalm comes from the period after that return from Exile in Babylon. The people of God are confident that the God who brought them to safety will always be present to protect them. Listen to these words of trust and hope.

¹GOD, my shepherd! I don't need a thing.

²You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from.

³True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.

⁴Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side.

Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.

⁵You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies.

You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.

⁶Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.

I'm back home in the house of GOD for the rest of my life.

John 10: 22-30

In this passage a failure to believe is connected with a failure to recognize the voice of the one who speaks for God. For those who put their trust in the institutions of Judaism, like the Temple, would be unable to recognize the true identity of Jesus. One must listen with trust in order to believe with confidence. Can we do that today?

²²They were celebrating Hanukkah just then in Jerusalem. It was winter. ²³Jesus was strolling in the Temple across Solomon's Porch. ²⁴The Jews, circling him, said, "How long are you going to keep us guessing? If you're the Messiah, tell us straight out."

²⁵Jesus answered, "I told you, but you don't believe. Everything I have done has been authorized by my Father, actions that speak louder than words. ²⁶You don't believe because you're not my sheep. ²⁷My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them real and eternal life. They are protected from the Destroyer for good. No one can steal them from out of my hand. ²⁹The Father who put them under my care is so much greater than the Destroyer and Thief. No one could ever get them away from him. ³⁰I and the Father are one heart and mind."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon – “A shepherd’s voice”

“My sheep recognize my voice” John 10: 27

“We’re drowning in information” Michael Enrizut, opening essay on Boston Bombing.

There was a time when this must have been a very powerful and compelling statement.

Sadly, I don’t think it means much to those of us who live in a very urban world in the 21st century.

What the shepherd represented in those ancient times is safety, leadership, protection, tireless presence, absolute devotion, selflessness and trustworthiness.

“Listen to me” says Jesus, “I won’t steer you wrong.”

Psalm 23 is among the most beloved pieces of verse in history because it promises to make all the bad things right and we are all desperate to hear that.

Gerald Sloyan (interpretation) makes an impressive observation in his commentary of John 10: 22-30

He contends that our faith will be powerful enough and confident enough to get us through all the trials and tribulations of life if we are able to do two things: listen to what is being said and listen to trusted voices.

This plays out in modern computer science:

From www.wisdegeek.com

Voice recognition can refer to one of two types of computer science: forensic voice identification or speech-to-text capability.

Mostly we’ve mastered getting devices to take dictation like your Bluetooth BUT identifying the voice source is still in its genesis.

Jesus said that there would be lots of information floating around but only some of it could be trusted because of where it was coming from.

It impacts on our choices of churches/ministers.

But it plays out in the larger world too.

Think no further than the media coverage of the Manitoba flood forecasting – politicians decrying flood forecasters as fear-mongers – citizens in flood prone areas unsure of what to do.

Consider this:

Is John Stewart the Most Trusted Man in America?

When Americans were asked in a 2007 poll by the Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press to name the journalist they most admired, Mr. Stewart, the fake news anchor, came in at No. 4, tied with the real news anchors, Brian Williams and Tom Brokaw of NBC, Dan Rather of CBS and Anderson Cooper of CNN. And a study this year from the centre’s Project for Excellence in Journalism concluded that “‘The Daily Show’ is clearly impacting American dialogue” and “getting people to think critically about the public square.” NY Times 17/08/08

Walter Cronkite’s obituary in the NY Times 18/07/09 called him “The trusted voice of TV News.”

Do we get our news from CBC or Fox, from the Globe and Mail or the National Inquirer?
- does the source make a difference?

If information is neutral, as some have said, what difference does it make to know the source?

From Reader's Digest Canada Magazine (May 2012)

The Most Trusted Canadians

The numbers indicate the percentage of respondents who claimed a positive level of trust towards the person in question.

1. Michael J. Fox, actor and activist (82)
2. Peter Mansbridge, CBC news anchor (71)
3. David Suzuki, environmentalist, scientist and broadcaster (70)
4. Wayne Gretzky, former hockey player and coach (69)
5. Mike Holmes, contractor and TV personality (68)
6. Clara Hughes, Olympic cyclist and speed skater (59)
7. Shania Twain, musician (55)
8. Margaret Atwood, author (53)
9. David Johnston, governor general (52)

The Least Trusted Canadians

The numbers indicate the percentage of respondents who claimed a negative level of trust towards the person in question.

1. Stephen Harper, prime minister (47)
2. Rob Ford, mayor of Toronto (44)
3. Bob Rae, politician (38)
4. Don Cherry, TV personality (36)
5. Justin Trudeau, politician (32)

Here's the full top 10 list of Forbes' most trustworthy celebrities:

1. Morgan Freeman (trustworthy score: 112)
2. Ron Howard (trustworthy score: 109)
3. Mike Holmes (trustworthy score: 108)
4. Tony Dungy (trustworthy score: 108)
5. Michael J. Fox (trustworthy score: 107)
6. Sandra Bullock (trustworthy score: 105)
7. Betty White (trustworthy score: 104)
8. James Earl Jones (trustworthy score: 104)
9. Tom Hanks (trustworthy score: 103)
10. Mike Rowe (trustworthy score: 103)

A Nielson survey in 2012 asked people what kind of advertising they most trusted -> 92% said word of mouth.

The source does matter.

People trusted Jesus – he demonstrated qualities of leadership and selflessness that were compelling – he spoke a truth that was full of compassion and mercy – he spoke for God and those who heard him found their lives transformed for the better.

And others have spoken of faith – people we have trusted and we came to believe -> and now we speak faithfully in our world to our family, neighbours, workplace conveying a message of safety, hope, justice -> our words and actions are believed because we have shown ourselves to be trustworthy and faithful.

And a new generation is equipped to walk in green pastures and in the shadowed valley with confidence and grace.