

MESSAGE - In His Grip

May 8, 2022

Rev. Lisa Kruse-Safford

SCRIPTURE John 10:22-30

²² Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

~~~~~

There is an age-old struggle for control and influence over others.

It's a constant in every culture and time.

It is played out online and in advertising; in politics and halls of power; it yes, the struggle exists in religion.

It's the struggle of the religious leaders 2,000 they are struggling to keep their influence over people; struggling because Jesus is gaining influence; and they can't seem to influence or keep Jesus within their control.

He keeps doing incredible things but not necessarily by following the rules that they are so very concerned with. Jesus would heal the sick [wonderful], but he would do that on the Sabbath [against the rules].

They just don't know what to make of him.

If he is the special ruler (the Messiah) they've been waiting for, they want to know. "if you are the Messiah, tell us plainly"

They can't qualify/approve of the work he has been doing

And they can't seem to overcome the influence he has over others. So they demand, "if you are the Messiah, tell us plainly"

It's a ridiculous demand because there is no possible way for Jesus to answer.

If he says, "yes I am the Messiah" they will argue with him.

Why aren't you following the rules?

Why aren't you working with us?

If he says, "no I am not", well, 1) he would be lying....and 2) they will have what they need to remove the influence he has over others.

It's a ridiculous demand because they have already decided what they want to think about Jesus.

Their attitude about Jesus is reflected in the setting:

Festival of Dedication...."Hanukkah" – the celebration of a miracle that took place 150 years before: when the temple was re-dedicated, the lights burned for 8 days when there was only oil for 1 day

However, they aren't believing the miracles taking place right in front of them.

Solomon's Colonnade....a long outdoor hallways with pillars and archways. A place for meditation, listening, praying and people gathering around rabbis to learn.

But they haven't gathered to listen nor learn from Jesus.

They have already decided what they want to think about Jesus

This is why they approach him in the colonnade in the way they do: they surround him.

"gathered around him"

The Greek wording here translates better as "a siege"

There's no where for him to go

It's a way for them to physically try to intimidate him and gain control over him.

Because they have refused to be influenced by him

They have refused to be his "sheep"

Which is exactly what Jesus says to them.

"You have not believed because you have refused to listen; you have refused to follow; you have refused to be my sheep."

Jesus calls out the choice they have already made about him.

And then he says something else:

That those who have chosen to follow him will always be held by him.

In this, Jesus calls out something else about them:

They do not continue caring for people they no longer can control.

Which is what they have done to a man Jesus healed...

*Refer to story in John 9*

But Jesus says: "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand."

He won't let us go.

This is what we celebrate today as we baptize and remember our own baptisms:

Jesus' love for us is stronger than any other influence over us.

And he won't stop holding on.

When "friends" unfriends us.

When political parties drop us if we disagree.

Even when the church cuts people off from community....

God holds on.

My friend and colleague, Paul Meyers, has used the salutation in emails and letters for years: In His Grip....

And if you are left wondering today what to make of Jesus...like the people of long ago.

If you struggle to believe

If it's hard for you to humble yourself to listen Jesus' teaching

If you are looking to discredit Jesus...

His grip is exactly what validates his ministry.