

## **“Wintertime’s Story”**

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

April 26, 2015

The gospel lesson is taken from the Book of John, chapter 10, verses 22 through 30. I’ll be reading from the *Common English Bible*. The time came for the Festival of Dedication in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple, walking in the covered porch named for Solomon. The Jewish opposition circled around him and asked, “How long will you test our patience? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

Jesus answered, “I have told you, but you don’t believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you don’t believe because you don’t belong to my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life. They will never die, and no one will snatch them from my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them from my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. God bless the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today. Amen.

In this passage of Scripture the Jewish “Feast of Dedication” or “The Feast of Lights” takes place. The Jews call it Hanukkah, and it celebrates the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeaus in 164B.C. The temple had been desecrated by the Romans, but then was rebuilt; it’s this event that the Feast of Dedication remembers.

It was winter as John tells us—the month of December, and that meant the wind came in from the east. To be outside for very long one would feel the raw and bitter cold that chilled the bones. So Jesus was walking in the part of the temple

that was enclosed; it was sheltered and protected him from the brutal and harsh wind. He was walking in Solomon's porch which was along the inner side of the wall of the temple that enclosed the outer court. Inside the porch there were rows of high stone columns—27 of them. As Jesus walked and meditated inside, some Jews surrounded him and said, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

What more did they need to know? Since the beginning of his ministry Jesus had shown them many things. Didn't the works and all the miracles provide all the evidence they needed? Jesus said to them, "I have told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me . . ." Jesus had performed countless miracles. Not only had he shown them *works* of miracles, but his *words* were also a testimony of who he was, but most of the Jews, especially the Jewish leaders had already made up their minds.

They showed a real attitude of hostility for a long time, and they were just looking for one more way to accuse him. The blind, the lame, the hungry, the lost, the deaf—all those Jesus had healed—they had no trouble believing who Jesus was, but the Jewish leaders were anxious and full of fear to protect their positions and role in society.

Why is it people can't believe? Or is it they won't believe? Do they have this "selective hearing" thing going on that prevents them from hearing reality? Then . . . just as now . . . people are looking for the Messiah, looking for God, and he's right in front of us, but we're blind. I think we all hear exactly what we listen for every day.

We can be overcome by the noise around us and sometimes we may feel like the circumstances in our lives and the world's is driving us in a downward direction. Instead of hearing the Shepherd speak to us we replay conversations that

build our fear. We focus on current events in the world that drives our faith to spiral in a downward direction. Instead of hearing the Shepherd's voice that brings comfort and peace to our minds, we continue to hear what the world says. The Shepherd calls our name, and we can't hear because we aren't listening.

The current happenings of the week in the world or even an anniversary of a horrific event can spark a chill in our bones. Last Sunday was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing—a domestic terrorist bomb attack carried out on a Federal Building on April 19, 1995. 168 people were killed and 680 were injured. The blast destroyed or damaged 324 buildings within a 16-block radius, destroyed or burned 86 cars, and shattered glass in 258 nearby buildings. It caused an estimated \$652 million worth of damage. We wonder when it'll stop, but instead the frequency of violence just seems to increase. What do we allow our minds to be focusing on? Are we hearing our Shepherd's voice?

At times we can feel surrounded by enemies, just as Jesus did that day on Solomon's porch. Our focus on God can get skewed—one minute we feel peace—and the next minute we feel the terror and violence that's in the world. Yet in the midst of all this Jesus prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies, and he anoints our head with oil—the oil of the Holy Spirit that brings new life regardless of what's happening around us. The Shepherd calls our name. Do we hear his voice?

Yes we live in a world filled with terror and violence, but we're called to proclaim the good news. We're called to proclaim that a Savior is here that has provided a way out of the shadows of the many dark valleys we walk through in life. We see and feel the terror all around us, but Christ, our Shepherd, restores our soul as we hear and follow his voice. The Messiah that the Jewish leaders were looking for *refused* to believe. They refused to hear the Shepherd's voice call to

them. They had already predestined *for themselves* what their future would hold. What about you? Who are you listening to?

When we hear the Shepherd's voice and respond in faith Jesus promises us eternal life, he promises us that death doesn't have the final word and that our life is indestructible. He also promises us a life that is secure because nothing can snatch us out of his hand. We still walk through dark valleys, but God promises to walk with us. We still have sorrow and suffering in the midst of a world that's terrorized, but God is with us.

I've heard about many in the congregation who have trouble turning on the news. It can bring worries, disappointment, and sometimes sleepless nights. If you're informed on the daily current events and even if you're not . . . . . allow your mind to focus on listening to the voice of your Shepherd. So when terror and darkness seek to overcome the light in your heart dismiss the darkness and roll it off. Don't entertain it for very long. Hear your Shepherd's voice. Read God's word and fill your mind with excellent things.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, for some here today this year's winter was harsh and chilling. But you call us each moment, despite our circumstances and the conditions of the world. Our goal is to make a determined and conscientious choice to listen to the voice of our Shepherd—a voice that brings comfort and peace. The world will always have terrorist news that chills our bones. Jesus calls softly and tenderly each moment of each day to center our thinking on him not the world's condition. Help us God to focus and hear our Shepherd's voice of comfort and peace that breaks through the chilling news that the world brings. Amen