

Fourth Sunday of Easter – 2025

Acts 20:17-35

Revelation 7:9-17

John 10:22-30

“What we’ve got here is *failure* to communicate.” It’s a famous line from a classic movie – *Cool Hand Luke*. Luke is a convict and he pretty much refuses to cooperate with the prison authorities. Because of this, Luke suffers a bit. The prison captain isn’t about to budge on the protocols for prisoners because Luke won’t comply. What we have here is a failure to communicate. The line highlights the fact that even when plain words are exchanged, understanding and acceptance aren’t automatic. Mozart and Metallica are both musicians but aficionados of one want to talk about power cords and aficionados of the other want to talk about concerto grosso. Is that a failure to communicate? I believe that some folks are genuinely confused by Christianity. I also believe that other folks are cold-heartedly opposed to Christianity. Is that a failure to communicate? We’ve all seen the 4-year-old little girl, when her mother is speaking to her, stick her fingers in her ears and say: “la-la-la-la-la, I can’t *hear* you.” The little tantrum girl doesn’t *want* to hear her mother. Is that failure to communicate?

God speaks and we listen. Do y’all believe that? God speaks and we listen. Do y’all believe that that is how communication starts? A group of grumpy Jews complain to Jesus that He doesn’t know how to communicate. John tells us that Jesus is walking in the Temple. John is keen to tell us that it is winter, that the Feast of Dedication is taking place. All this is to reinforce the idea that Jesus is the New Temple, the New and Greater Temple. The Temple is where God’s presence resided. The Temple was the place of salvation for the Jew. The Temple was where the sacrifices were offered. Like winter, the relationship between the Lord Christ and Jews was frosty, frigid. John tells us that the Word made flesh came to His own and His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). That’s frosty. John tells us that the Word was made flesh and *tabernacled* among us (John 1:14). Jesus is the immediate presence of God in human flesh. He communicates what is true and good and eternal and beautiful and enriching and enlivening. And some of those with whom He communicated did not want to hear it.

“So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly’” (John 10:24). Do you sense the hostility? It’s definitely there. The religious authorities ultimately crucified Jesus because He claimed to be the Messiah (Matthew 26:62-68). They don’t *want* to hear. It seems to me, I could be wrong, but it seems to me that the Jewish authorities were engaged in religion for religion’s sake. Who Jesus is and what He was teaching threatened their religion and so they crucified Him. It was indeed a failure to communicate – but in what way? Jesus says in what way: “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:25-28).

Do you know what the Lord Christ said about you? He said that no one can snatch you of His hand. He said that you are His sheep. He said that you hear His voice. He said that He knows

you. He said that He gives you eternal life. He said that you will never perish. There is no failure to communicate in this place. Isn't that marvelous? The Viva Vox Jesu, the living voice of Jesus, echoes in this place. He speaks and we listen. God tells us who He is, who we are, what we are, what our relationship to Him is built on, what He desires, what He has done, how to view the world, how to view our neighbor. We are equipped to live beautiful lives by virtue of this Word. The unbelieving world is sticking its fingers in its ears like a four-year-old little girl throwing a tantrum (I'm not picking on girls – I've seen plenty of boy tantrums).

The world wants to lead you. The world will never tire of attempting to drive a wedge between you and the Lord Christ. Sheep who pretend, when they're in the company of the unbelieving, sheep who pretend not to be sheep are simply playing a religious game. If you give unbelievers the idea that you're just as happy to stick your fingers in your ears and pretend that you don't hear the Lord, that you don't hear His commands, then you are playing a double-minded game, a spiritual kabuki that will leave you empty inside or worse. We keep ourselves sexually pure. Marriage and marriage alone is the domain for sexual relations. We are sheep. Deceit at any time is forbidden. We will not lie; we will not misrepresent the truth. We are sheep. There's been no failure to communicate on our Father's part. We know the truth. The truth has set us free. We are sheep. We remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. We don't despise preaching and God's holy Word, but we hold it sacred and gladly hear it and gladly learn it. We pray. We help the sick and the weak and the vulnerable. We tithe. We use our gifts for God's glory. We treat others with the kindness and dignity that the Lord has shown us. We are sheep.

Mothers – they are to be honored. That is a unique and wondrous vocation – motherhood. You shall honor your father and your mother. The family is God's design. Ideally, mother and father together, raising children, teaching children, protecting their lambs. Mothers communicate their love in a multitude of ways. Running a household, helping with homework, gentle but firm discipline, encouragement to succeed, a model of sacrifice and industry and fidelity to Christ and His church. Mothers are to be honored. Mothers are love in action. In a very real sense, the church is our mother. The font is her womb. She conceives and gives birth to Christians by water and the word. The church communicates the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. The church speaks words of grace and unity and sacrifice and faith. The church sings to us her song of love and we grow strong in her embrace. The church is our mother. From her arms she has blessed us on our way. The church teaches us how to sit at Christ's feet, how to worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth, how to wait patiently for our Lord's return, how to love one another, how to use our gifts for the benefit of others. Mostly, the church teaches us how to listen.

Christ spoke in such a way that all His sheep will hear His voice. Jesus' antagonists weren't listening. You are. To them, when they asked Jesus to tell them plainly if He is the Christ, the Lord said: "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me" (John 10:25). The works that I do... When Jesus changed water into wine, He was declaring Himself to be the Christ. The OT says that the Messianic age would be heralded by the mountains dripping sweet wine (Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13). Christ's works speak. His works show us who He is. The OT says that the Messianic age would be heralded by the eyes of the blind being opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame man will leap like a deer, the tongue of the mute will sing for joy (Isaiah 35:5-6). The Lord Jesus, and He alone, fulfilled all that.

When Jesus cleansed the leprous, what was He saying? When He fed the multitudes with a paltry supply of five loaves and two fish, what was He saying? When He raised dead Lazarus, what was He saying?

You know what He was saying because you are one of His sheep. He was saying that He had come to restore creation. By death and resurrection, by taking all sin into His person and paying the fearsome price with His blood, by being mocked and scourged and pierced the Lord has established His kingdom forever. He has cleansed us of our sin. He feeds us with His righteousness. He raises His sheep from death. You know it for you are His sheep. You hear His voice. You see in your mind's eye the wonder of His glory. You are His sheep. You see Him now. By faith, you see Your Good Shepherd tend you with His forgiveness, His divine protection and His love. The Lord is risen. He communicates by Word and Sacrament. The message is unmistakably clear. He is the Son of God. He paid the price for our sins. We have forgiveness in His name. We are His sheep. He is our Good Shepherd.