**The Holy Gospel according to John 10: 22-30**

**22**At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, **23**and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. **24**So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” **25**Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my father’s name testify to me; **26**but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. **27**My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. **28**I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. **29**What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. **30**The Father and I are one.”

In the previous verses, Jesus’ had commented about being the good shepherd, with the proclaimed ability to lay down his life, and also had the power to pick it up again.

So, this story begins where the words of Jesus had the propensity to generate considerable controversy. At this point, the Jews were divided in opinion. Some thought he was not worth listening to, while others were inclined to listen because of the blind man he had recently healed. Some thought he had a demon in him. Alternatively others argued that a demon could not have healed the blind.

So, we are now in the middle of, to put it politely, a public discourse. Here is a guy who healed a blind man with saliva and mud. The Pharisees immediately depicted him as a huckster, in modern day terms, a con man. With miracles like this taking place, it is small wonder that he was labelled as a threat to the establishment. Consequently, the religious leadership now attempted to identify Jesus as a threat, the personification of a demonic power. But it gets worse. By the time the narrative arrives at the unity declaration in verse thirty, i.e., “the father and I are one,” Jesus has become such a dangerous threat that legal violence began to spill into the story.

One might quite reasonably ask, why the escalation? What kind of threat had Jesus become? Although some people were undecided about the origin of his authority, the idea that Jesus is God’s anointed representative apparently fell beyond the imagination of his interrogators. To them, Jesus was a divider, a deceiver, and a blasphemer. So here we have the division. On one side we have the Jews protecting their own power, and on the other, the followers of Christ who had been expelled from the Synagogue.
But Jesus is a divider?
While the Synoptic Gospels, i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke, frequently portray the entrance of the reign of God using the language of division, John’s gospel does not. John’s gospel speaks for a community who are questioning the meaning of this estrangement and division.

One of the most interesting elements of the Good Shepherd metaphor was the predator and prey relationship. These were rough times. It was a dynamic central to first-century people’s surviving natural and imperial threats. Its theological and social meanings interact to convey both a vividly spiritual and decidedly social message. Wolves and thieves might threaten the sheepfold, while Jesus’ empowerment from God protects it. The message could not be clearer. Jesus was no threat to the community, he was the promised saviour. The good shepherd! But human power can be such a threat. In fact, the current carnage and mess in Europe has been caused by one inhuman human being. Nothing much changes to this day.

At this point it looks very much like Jesus is heading for trouble! There was no doubt that he was an intelligent and realistic thinker who had captured a certain percentage of the public imagination. He was not prone to despair and pessimism, nor for that matter, did he share the groundless optimism of some of his disciples. But he certainly understood the dilemma developing before him with the Jewish leaders.

In verse 24 they requested Jesus to tell them plainly if he was the Messiah. There were some political overtones here, was he the one with the power to liberate the Jewish people from Roman imperial rule? There could be some ambiguity in fathoming the intent of this question. This question was more likely to be hostile and sarcastic, than inquisitive, since the Jewish authorities had been trying to kill Jesus since John chapter 5. Regardless, this is the one place in the fourth gospel where “Jesus was asked directly, “are you the Messiah?” His response indicated that his identity was made plainly clear, even if he never said, “I am the Messiah.”

His response to his interrogators was one of sincerity and echoed many of the claims he had made in previous speeches. The works that he did in the Father’s name testified to his origin and the unity with God, yet many were unable to believe. So he resorted to the simple analogy, that of the shepherd and his sheep. It was only his sheep who know his voice, follow him, receive eternal life, and remain securely and safely in his grasp.

Video - Shepherd calling his sheep

Our dogs also come to the sound of our voice … er, when it suits. It depends if there is something more interesting that needs checking. Last year the only way I could keep them away from two large dead seals was to bury them, the seals that is. The locals thought I was doing public service, but I was just keeping the dogs away. They were quite large and I’m glad they weren’t whales!

However, getting back to John’s story, Jesus’ reply did not conform with the Jewish leaders. His answer “the Father and I are one” maintained that God was his Father, and this amounted to blasphemy in the eyes of his antagonists. It was enough to incite the Jewish authorities to kill.

My own mind boggles. How could a perceived threat to Jewish power induce these ostensibly God fearing Jewish leaders, to descend to an act of such murderous insanity, and deprive the world of a good and decent man who had been sent by and from God, as their saviour?

Amen