

Easter 4C 2010
John 10:22-30
Sermon for Advent LC
April 25th, 2010

“Hear the Truth- Can You Handle it?”

Dear sisters and brothers, grace to you and peace from God the Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What do you hear in the world right now? That’s a wide open and vague question, perhaps a little loaded- but I am curious right now when you allow yourself to listen, to hear, to pause long enough to pay attention to the world around you- what is it that you hear? Let’s go beyond the obvious... I mean yes there are obvious things that we hear, like sounds of nature, and sounds of cars and trucks- I think that when I am in my office I jump at least once a day at the startling noise of a big truck vrooming through town outside my window...so there are those things, those sounds, those experiences that we hear. But...what else do you hear in this world, in your life, in the lives of those around you? I hear a world where people are afraid, people are unsure of the future and they speak their minds about it sometimes vocally and sometimes via the internet and facebook and blogs where they can express their voice a little more safely. I also hear people that are angry and hurt, frustrated and fed up with one thing or another. I hear a world where its seemingly impossible to find peace- everywhere we turn there is another thing to hear, or another best thing that we have to know about- I hear a lot of false hope and false promises, I hear a lot of injustice and hate, I hear a lot of things that cause me pause and admittedly a little loss of hope sometimes if I’m not careful. I hear in this community called Advent a lot of hope...hope that is founded in where God is leading us- but that hope is not free of reality either and while hope leads us- some of you, I hear, are unsure of what’s next in your life...I hear pain that runs deep...I hear scars of past that won’t leave you alone...I hear a lot for there’s a lot to hear...so what do we do with it?

Friends I believe that we, as the body of Christ, need to pause once in a while to listen carefully to what our fellow sisters and brothers are experiencing, what they are saying even when they say nothing at all- you see being part of community means we are to care for one another- and sometimes because we don’t want to offend we refuse to pry a little- it’s a tough balance but one we must try to make...being aware of those around us and also being willing to share when we need help, when we are afraid, when we are alone...so the community can pick us up. Now before you get too worried- this kind of language is not made up- it’s not just Pastor Justin feeling the need for more community- it stems from our very identity as children of God known by the Father through the Savior Jesus Christ. You see, if we take the promises of the Bible seriously we will hear a God that calls us to be in community only because of what that God did for us as our shepherd...we are sheep together- led by the one true shepherd. And as sheep, in the flock we gotta do better at caring for one another as our Lord has cared for us. Does any of that make sense? I hope so...let’s look at the Gospel and see what our Lord gives us to hear. I think that we will hear a God who promises to be with us...and in that is the call that we as well are with one another.

We find Jesus in the temple this morning in our Gospel. Its winter time, the festival of dedication- a big deal- is taking place and the heat is being turned up on our Lord. The Jewish leaders are getting more and more concerned about who Jesus really is so they circle around him...almost it seems trying to intimidate him...and they ask him again to quit annoying them literally- and to just tell them yes or no are you the Messiah? This scene reminds me of the movie A Few Good Men when Jack Nicholson's character is being interrogated and there is this great sequence where he says, "Do you want answers" and Tom's Cruise's character responds, "I think I'm entitled" and Nicholson replies again replies, "Do you want answers" and Cruise says "I want the truth" to which Nicholson replies with that great line, "You can't handle the truth". It seems to me that the Jews want answers and Jesus isn't sure they can handle it- because their idea of a Messiah is so different from what Jesus really is. So the truth is, and Jesus does finally tell them- yes, I am God's son, I am God and that means that I am here to change everything...and also that I am here for my children and I will protect them- I will be their God- they will hear me and know me- and what knowing me means is full relationship, full protection, full love, full community- enough of your religious ways which simply keep people out- that's the truth...and they can't handle it. We know how the story ends...with him dying...the truth is hard to hear- God's truth is this friends- you are loved...your Lord died for you and in doing that has changed everything and demands that you realize it and give up your own sense of individualism for a sense of belonging to God and to a community...do you hear that? Can you handle it? Sometimes its hard to give up our own self for the sake of the greater love that is Jesus.

The promise is good...is great...and the promise of God that I pray you hear has the power to quiet all those other noises...the noise of fear, of pain, of anger, of frustration, of everything. Jesus is clear in the Gospel for today that nothing can separate us from him and his love- he protects us- that image is so powerful- you will not be snatched from his hand! Now...God may not stop all the suffering you will endure but certainly we know it has no power in the end to separate us from our Lord. And as community, as people gathered around this promise that we hear- you need to be of the business of lifting that promise up together in this place, in this community in your lives and your world- for you are the ones that must carry this promise forward otherwise the reality is the noises of the world that counter Christ's hope will get louder and louder- so if you know the truth, if you can handle the truth, make the truth of Christ's love for you your identity that you share with everyone around you. The truth is God loves you....forever...no matter what...can you handle it?

God loves you and so do I. Amen.