

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster

May 8th, 2022, Fourth Sunday of Easter

*Acts 9:36-43, Psalm 23, Revelation 7:9-17, John 10:22-30

You do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep.

I don't know if I'm the only one, but this feels like Jesus is playing the exclusion game, who is in and who is not.

In some way it feels like a circular argument. That you cannot understand unless you are part of the inside, and then it will all be revealed to you. Or as Diana Bulter Bass has suggested; the traditional way of coming into the fold is: **Believing, Behaving, Belonging**. That we say the right things, act in the right way, then belong to the community of faith.

She suggests it should change to **Belonging, Behaving, Believing**. This means we come to join the group and community and then understand it fully. Or as she points out in her book, *Freeing Jesus*, that understanding in this way is moving from the head to the heart or the gut.

I was listening to a sermon as I was preparing this sermon, we all want distractions and will find other things to occupy us while we are trying to accomplish and prepare what we should be doing.

But in so doing, I was reminded of the original view and understanding of belief. That it was less about what we said we believed and more about how we acted out that belief and more about trust in the future.

This means, Jesus is not saying he has decided who are his sheep and who are not, but it is about self selection. We are the ones who choose to believe or not, to trust or not as we move forward in our lives.

So, it is as Diana Butler Bass says, it is not so much the head knowledge, but our hearts or guts that get us to trust in God and live out our relationship with God in the community with each other.

And say the words of the Psalm in our hearts and gut, *your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

Now we may think then our life has been and should then be total happiness and joy, but it hasn't been, and it will not be, so are we then deluding ourselves?

A cliché comes to mind: is the glass half empty or half full? Our relationship with God is one which doesn't get us away from the half empty parts of our lives but helps us not to forget the half full parts and see the whole picture. That God in the Spirit is with us through it all.

In a way, the Psalm says the same thing: *You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; **

This is both good news and a challenge. We are at the table and belong at the table of the Lord, but also with those who are enemies and who give us challenges and concerns.

And: He *guides me along right pathways for his name's sake.*

It says to me that our journey of faith is not finished, and the path is filled with challenges and temptations and problems as well. But that the spirit will help and guide us through the challenges of life. And will revive our souls as well for the journey ahead.

Amen

Blessing:

May the path that you walk
be ever guided by justice and light
By the truth that you stand.
May it show, into the land.
May the words of Christ
disturb you all your life.
The road you've chosen is not easy
– yet, here you stand!
(from the song, *The Path*, by Jason Mann, adapted)