

SERMON – 11/5/25

'Why Believe in Jesus?'

John 10:22-30

"The people gathered around Jesus and asked, 'How long are you going to keep us in suspense? Tell us the plain truth: are you the Messiah?'" (John 10:24)

Over these last weeks since Easter we have been looking at the resurrection appearances of Jesus – His coming on the morning He was raised from the dead to the women and the men who had followed Him from Galilee, and again that evening on the Road to Emmaus and in a locked room in Jerusalem, and as we saw last Sunday, again some time later back in Galilee on the lake-shore after an abortive night's fishing.

For these first followers, seeing led to believing, and perhaps we are tempted to say that if we were able to have a similar face-to-face physical encounter with the Risen Jesus we too would be more secure in our faith and more likely to turn our world upside down like they did instead of allowing this world's secular philosophies to turn many of those of us who profess to be Christians into what the newly-elected Leo XIV described this week as 'practical atheists'.

So my question to you this morning nearly 2000 years on from the first Easter is this: 'Why believe in Jesus?' Maybe we are like those we met in this morning's reading, which takes us back to an episode during Jesus' earthly ministry when many of those who heard Him preach and saw Him in action were not convinced. "Tell us the plain truth," they asked Jesus. "Are you the Messiah?" But Jesus *had* told them and they hadn't listened – "I've already told you, He said, but you wouldn't believe me." (v.25) Perhaps Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah they were expecting and perhaps in a similar way some of us struggle with what the Easter Gospel asks of us today. Some of those who encountered Jesus during His earthly ministry were not the kind of flock who would listen to the Shepherd's voice and follow Him, and when He spoke in the clearest of terms they wouldn't have it – "The Father and I are one," He proclaimed, but they picked up stones to put Him to death for blasphemy. They had heard Him preach and been

astonished by the power of His words; they had seen the miracles and marvelled at the wonderful things He had done but they would not believe in Him. Why believe in this Jesus, who shook their preconceived idea of what God's Messiah would be like? And so Jesus slips out of their grasp, out of the city and back across the Jordan to the place where (a couple of years earlier) John had been baptising, drawing the crowds who were looking for something more satisfying in life and pointing to the One who would come after Him who would be so much greater than he was.

That is where people were gathering, looking for something more – in contrast to the city-dwellers with their busy schedules and the establishment figures with their power bases to maintain, these folk who had gone outside the city walls, retreated to the lonely places, gone on a search for truth, heard and saw Jesus speaking and working miracles, remembered what John the Baptist had taught about the One who was to come, and believed. Instead of asking Jesus to tell them plainly if He was the Messiah, they saw for themselves the truth and the fulfilment of John's message and trusted in Jesus for themselves – surely this is the Messiah – and in our time too there are many who are responding to the message of Christ, not because it is the expected thing but because they have seen who Jesus is and have believed for themselves.

So why might that be? Why would someone, why would you or I or anyone at all believe in Jesus? There are a few pointers in what we have read this morning, so let's take a look.

Firstly, Jesus is the Good Shepherd and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice. There is something very mysterious about the call to faith, something that happens deep within the individual and which in a sense is unconnected to what is happening on the surface – a person may *apparently* be drawn to faith in Christ because they have found help from a Christian friend or from the Church community at a time of particular need; they may *apparently* be led to faith through the sharing of a powerful message in a context of worship; but the fact of the matter is that for every person who comes to faith in Christ in a supportive environment of faith, there is another who puts their trust in the Lord in the desert place, in the face of opposition and persecution. For in reality it is the voice of the Good Shepherd, and His voice

alone that calls in the deep places of the human heart. Jesus says, 'My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never die. No-one can snatch them away from me.' (v.27-28) Why believe in Jesus? Perhaps it is because you hear the Shepherd calling you.

Secondly, one of the most important reasons for believing in Jesus is because of who He is. "The Father and I are one," He tells the crowds in Jerusalem, and they pick up stones to put Him to death for blasphemy – it is what in fact ultimately sends Him to the Cross. But what if it is true? Who is this Jesus? If He is 'only a man' as the crowds accuse Him, then we must weigh up what He has said and done in the same way as we would give consideration to the claims of any other human being, whoever that might be. But if He is one with the Father, if He is the Son of God, if He is the Word of God made flesh, if the Word is God, then does that not make all the difference? Are the consequences of believing or not believing not raised to an altogether different level? The overwhelming majority of people in the world say that they believe in God (albeit there are multiple understandings of what or who God is) and it could be argued that it is almost a human instinct to trust in a higher hand. But the question today is not Why believe in God, but Why believe in *Jesus*? And that is what requires us to look at faith not so much as a philosophical idea but as putting our trust in a person and entering into a relationship with that person. What if Jesus is God? What is God is in fact the One we come to know as we come to know Jesus? It makes all the difference.

Thirdly, and this follows on from the previous point, not only is it significant that Jesus claims to be the Son of God, it is of profound importance that the Father sent His Son into the world. It is sometimes said that religion is about people's search for God and that the difference with Christianity is that it is about God's search for us. God loved the world so much that, having offered His people Israel a way of faith that relied on the obedience of Laws and the making of sacrifices, in the fulness of time, God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him. My friends, God sent His only Son into the world for each one of us, for you and for me. Like the Good Shepherd looking for His sheep, He is searching each one of

us out and calling for us even now. Why believe in Jesus? Well, at the risk of sounding really cheesy, He believes in us and that demands a response from us.

In the verses that follow those we read this morning, Jesus remonstrates with those who are trying to stone Him to death for blasphemy – “I have done many good deeds in your presence which the Father gave me to do. For which of these do you stone me? ... Do not believe me, then, if I am not doing the things my Father wants me to do. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me you should at least believe my deeds in order that you may know once and for all that the Father is in me and that I am in my Father.” (vv.32, 37-38) In a scientific age, where evidence is everything, why believe in Jesus? There can be no empirical proof; there is nothing physical or intellectual that will convince an unbeliever to put their trust in Christ. But to the sceptic I say with Jesus, 'At least believe His deeds.' At least take into account the secondary evidence, the effect that faith in Christ has had on people who have changed the world because of their commitment to Him and to His Kingdom.

I will not argue anyone into the Kingdom – no-one can, not even Jesus Himself – but I will continue to ask people to be open to Him, to listen for the Shepherd's voice, to consider whether Jesus is God, to wonder why God loves you so much that He was willing to send His only Son into the world to die for you, to look at the evidence of the experience of others.

“Tell us the plain truth,” the people in Jerusalem asked of Jesus: “Are you the Messiah?” Well you tell me – that's for each one of us in the world to come to a decision about, and for each one of us in the church to be ready to give an answer about if someone should ask us.

We can read the accounts of the resurrection appearances of Jesus to His first disciples and there is much for us to learn from them. We can read of the countless people who have put their faith in Christ over the succeeding centuries too and there are many, many stories to tell that will inspire and challenge. But when it comes right down to it, there is only one story that has significance

for us and that is the story that is to be written about each one of us ourselves.

Why believe in Jesus? Well this sheep says, 'I hear the Shepherd's voice; He knows me and I follow Him. He gives me eternal life and I will never die. No one can snatch me away from Him.'

What about you?