

“How Long Will You Keep Us in Suspense?” (John 10:22-42)

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By Mark Archibald

As we read John 10:22-42:

- **What catches your attention?**
- **What words are repeated?**

Things are escalating! Much of the teaching about Jesus that is communicated in John happens through the conversations Jesus has with people. Many of the conversations that Jesus has had with the people and especially the religious leaders have been tense, but the frequency of these almost violent encounters is increasing.

- ***Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him . . . (John 10:31)***
- ***Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp. (John 10:39)***

But the picking up of stones to kill Jesus and the attempt to grab Jesus did not come out of nowhere. Right from the very start, this has been a heated conversation. As Jesus has been walking in the temple area, we read, ***The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” (John 10:24)***

This is more intimidating and sinister than another debate or discussion. It may be more accurate instead to say, ***The Jews who were there circled in on him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” (John 10:24)*** Their posture is that of intimidation - the people here are picking a fight from the very start. This is no friendly conversation.

Jesus answered “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

Jesus tells them, as Katelyn explained in last week’s sermon, that Jesus is the shepherd, and only the sheep that belong to the shepherd can hear what the shepherd is saying. Because the people cornering Jesus do not believe in Jesus, they do not understand what he is saying and they reject what he is saying.

What they do hear, plainly, is his claim that “I and the Father are one.” This is where they gather up stones to stone him. This is completely offensive to them. How dare he put himself on the same level as God, how dare he claim to be God.

Jesus and the people debate back and forth about his identity and who he is and what his coming to the world means. And in this argument, Jesus uses a word over and over again to prove who he is. That word is “works”.

This word “works” could also be used to describe his “signs”, his miracles done proving he is who he claims to be. These works and the way in which they are done are proof of Jesus’ connection to God and proof of his oneness with God. Jesus uses the word “works” repeatedly in this interaction.

When told, tell us plainly if you are the Messiah, Jesus responds, **The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me.**

When Jesus tells them “I and the Father are one,” and people reach for stones to kill him, Jesus responds, **“I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”**

As he further justifies his oneness with the Father he says, **Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father.** If there is no evidence of God’s works being done, you are right not to believe in me. If it is clear that I am acting independently, do not believe me. If the works I do are contrary to the goodness of God, do not believe.

Jesus continues, **“But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”**

Jesus is saying that even if they disagree on his identity, even if they disagree on their understanding of God and God’s work in the world, even if they disagree on what is right and what’s wrong, look at his works. Look at what he is doing. Are the things he is doing consistent with God the Father? What do the things he is doing say about God?

If Jesus is not from God, if Jesus is not one with the Father, the things that he does will not stand up to scrutiny. The things he says about himself will be proven false. The fruit of what he does points to the kind of tree the fruit is coming from.

In Gospel of Matthew, chapter 12, Jesus has this to say about the connection between trees and fruit:

³³ “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. ³⁵ A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

In Matthew 12, Jesus says that what we are full of comes out in our words. Loving people produce loving words. Angry people produce angry words. The same is true of our actions and the same is true of Jesus’ works. What our heart is full of our actions will also be full of. Our works demonstrate what is most important to us.

If Jesus is producing works that are consistent with the teaching, character and work of God the Father, Jesus is then connected with God the Father. Disbelieve the teaching of Jesus all you want – but if what he does lines up with who God is, he’s worth following.

Well, the people near the Temple did not believe that Jesus was one with the Father. After he tells them, “But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and

understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” **Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.**

Jesus escapes, and this section of the Gospel of John returns full circle, back to John the Baptist. ⁴⁰ **Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. There he stayed, ⁴¹ and many people came to him. They said, “Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true.” ⁴² And in that place many believed in Jesus.**

In the book of John the arrival of Jesus divides the world. This is clear in this passage. Some try to seize Jesus to do him harm. Others receive him gladly and believe in him.

The establishment, the good temple folk or church folk, the religious leaders – they don’t believe in Jesus. But the people in the wilderness do. They’ve experienced some stuff. The stuff of life that wears you down and wears you out. And that stuff allows them to encounter Jesus without baggage, see his works clearly, and easily believe who he is.

The Gospel of John gives us a very clear vision about who sees the works of Jesus and believes and who sees those same works and does not believe. There are sharp contrasts throughout the book between belief and unbelief, darkness and light, blindness and sight. There are very clearly those who claim Jesus and those who reject him.

But increasingly, I find our world is not like that today. There are a lot of people claiming Jesus! There are a LOT of movements that Jesus’ name gets attached to. People are using Jesus’ name to give credibility to their cause. Jesus’ name is getting attached to some very suspect perspectives and beliefs. And depending who you are, your definition of suspect perspectives and beliefs will be different. How do we know what’s of God and what’s not? How do we know what is genuinely connected to Jesus?

What did Jesus say was the evidence of his connection to the Father? His works! What are the works of Jesus in the book of John? Look through the book so far, chapter by chapter, and note the works of Jesus. People are fed, people with impossible illnesses are healed, celebration is abundant, people are restored, unlikely people are experiencing and known by God, barriers between people are being broken down, barriers between people and God are being broken down. The fruit of who Jesus is and what he makes possible are clear and good. There is no question he is one with the Father.

How do we know what is good and right? How do we know what claimed causes are actually connected to Jesus?

Is it through a test of theology? No, not really. Jesus and the religious leaders couldn’t agree. And so Jesus says, look at my works. If we cannot be on the same page theologically, what is the evidence of what I’m doing?

Those same things will be true of the work of God in the world.

Jesus and the Father were one. He did not work to show he was connected to God. His works were a natural outcome of his oneness with God.

The same for us and others. This is not about doing good works to prove something. That's manipulation. But if we are connected with Jesus, the fruit of that connection will be clear and obvious. If people are claiming Jesus as their mascot, look at the things they are producing. Are their works similar at all to what Jesus produces in the book of John – healing, providing, restoring, connecting? Or are they completely unrelated – harming, withholding, damaging, dividing?

Jesus was clearly known by his works. If people are truly connected to Jesus, they will be known by their works as well.

As the handbells play for us in a moment, if it's helpful for you, think on these things.

What are the works of Jesus in the Gospel of John?

Where do you see these same works in our world?

Where is Jesus at work in your life? In the lives of others? In our world?