

# Seeking the Messiah

---

**John 10:22-30**

**April 17, 2016**

**First Christian Church**

**Rev. Renee Hoke**

**Wichita Falls, Texas**

22 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup>and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup>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.' <sup>25</sup>Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; <sup>26</sup>but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup>The Father and I are one.'

This is the fourth Sunday of Eastertide, this season of resurrection, and I don't know about you but I am so glad we have more than one Sunday to wrap our hearts and minds around the significance of the empty tomb. From the earliest years of Christianity, there have a prescribed collection of scriptures that the church reviews every year in the Sundays after Easter. We pour over the resurrection accounts found in the gospels. That's what we've have done here together over the last three Sundays. This is also a time when we take a second look as some of the foundational teaching of Jesus concerning his identity and his relationship with God the Father. How does the resurrection illuminate these scriptures?

When you think about it, we spend these Sundays after Easter working like detectives, combing through the evidence, reading the testimony of eye witnesses, searching for additional clues.

A few weeks ago a colleague of mine told me he was reading a book titled How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes. The author Maria Konnikova is a psychologist who became something of an expert on the character created by Arthur Conan Doyle. Psychologist Konnikova says Sherlock Holmes' brilliance is based on two practices: rigorous observation and the practice of mindfulness.

A word about rigorous observation. It's not simply letting objects enter your visual field. Keep in mind that our brains are bombarded with something like eleven million pieces of data at once and we can only consciously process about 40 of those pieces. Rigorous observation is the art knowing what and how to observe—when you zoom in what details do you choose to focus on, which ones do you deliberately omit?

“A man's brain is like a little empty attic,” said Holmes, and we get to choose what data we want to store there. Space is limited so store carefully. And be warned that the data you choose to store now becomes the basis of every future deduction you will make. How many episodes of “King of the Hill” are stacked in your attic right now?

If we can keep up with Sherlock Holmes' advanced skills of observation, the next challenge is practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness is the ability, when your mind wanders, to bring it back to the task at hand,

and to do that over and over again. Mindfulness is the skills you are using right now trying to concentrate on what I'm saying about Sherlock Holmes. Every Sunday during the sermon Dave and I give you a wonderful opportunity to practice mindfulness.

I first got interested in practicing mindfulness during my years at A&M. (No, this isn't the set-up to an Aggie joke.) My job at the television station on campus put me in contact with lots of interesting people who came to lecture at A&M. One day I interviewed an author whose new book discussed how practicing transcendental meditation could lower your blood pressure and improve your concentration. Immediately I wanted to know more. I bought the book and signed up for meditation lessons. This was in the days when my husband and I were in school full-time and maintaining a couple part-time jobs and trying desperately to live on a budget until we graduated. The transcendental meditation lessons pretty much wiped out our grocery budget for a month. Turns out my husband didn't really appreciate my pursuit of mindfulness. He was much more interested in having food to eat.

Whether you practice Eastern meditation or Christian contemplation or classic centering prayer, you learn over time to harness those wandering thoughts and gently guide your mind back to the center. As Sherlock Holmes says, "Mindfulness is a skill acquired with grit and practice rather than an in-born talent or an easy feat attained with a few half-hearted

tries.” Once you harness mindfulness, decision-making improves along with judgment, starting from the building block of your own mind.

Not so elementary at all, my dear Watson.

Now it’s time for some detective work of our own. It’s not always easy going in the gospel of John. Today’s passage is no exception. We are going to need to listen with both heart and mind to what Jesus has to say.

This scripture in front of us today is near the end of five long chapters that record the controversies and opposition that Jesus’ ministry attracted. In our reading today, those who are challenging Jesus claim they are tired of waiting for an answer.

“How long will you keep us in suspense, Jesus?”

“If you’re the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

Jesus claims that they’ve missed the announcement, that he has already answered this question. But a Sherlock Holmes style investigation of the preceding chapters doesn’t find such a declaration in words. There are parables and metaphors but it is most clearly through what he does that Jesus answers the question of his identity. By the time we get to chapter 10, Jesus has...

- healed a man who was paralyzed, and fed the five thousand, and offered the woman at the well living water;
- driven corrupt merchants from the Temple, and taught Nicodemus what it means to be born of the Spirit:

- restored sight for a blind man, walked on water, and spared the life of the woman caught in adultery.

One of the strongest testimonies regarding Jesus comes from the man who was blind from birth, the Pharisees launch an investigation that turns a Jerusalem neighborhood upside down. They interview the neighbors, the parents, the former blind man is interrogated at length and then brought back again for a follow-up. When he's finally had enough, the man says something similar to what Jesus says in Chapter 10...

*I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples? Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing!"*

The witness of a man who once was blind and now can see.

There is no separation between who Jesus is and what he does. His opponents claim that he has not offered the words they are looking for but again and again in John's gospel we see how the teaching of Jesus is twisted and turned by those who wish to discredit him. Beware of the one who continues to ask for a simple explanation when the truth is right in front of him.

There is no separation between who Jesus is and what he does... and there is no separation between the Father and the Son.

“The Father and I are one,” Jesus says. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” he will tell Philip later. “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

Perhaps it is only fitting that Jesus turns back at the end of the chapter to the shepherd images he uses at the beginning. I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Those words are in the early verses of John 10. But when Jesus circles back to that theme a second time, he uses different words to explain the behavior of his opponents.

“You do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and follow me.”

Some scholars suggest that this verse more than any other gives the doctrine of election a solid biblical foundation more than any other. Are some people predestined to be “in” while others are “out?” Where salvation is concerned, could it be that the deck stacked against some people at the outset? Is that what Jesus is suggesting here?

Theologian Roger Olson of Truett Seminary wrote in *Christianity Today* about the debate surrounding election. He titled his article “Election is for Everyone.”

*The Bible is filled with references to God's choice of people, both individuals and groups. Abraham was not just "called" by God but also "chosen" or "elected" to be the father of God's "chosen people," God's elect nation of Israel (Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 45:4). The church is the elect of God, chosen for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5). Paul was clearly chosen by God for apostleship (Acts 9). It would be no stretch of truth to say that God's election of people is central to the biblical message, to the gospel. And it can safely be said that people's election is through God's grace, not human achievement. Nowhere does the Bible even hint that people elect themselves.*

*“In Jesus and his cross, God has said, "Yes!" to all people. If anyone has been elected to salvation, it is because God first elected Jesus Christ and then, by grace, included all sinners in that election.”*

I love that sentence: In Jesus and his cross, God has said “Yes!” to all people. This is a reminder of one important aspect of God’s character--the sovereignty of God, the biblical teaching that all things are under God's rule and control, and that nothing happens without God’s direction or permission. The sovereignty of God is not merely that God has the power and right to govern all things, but that He does so, always and without exception.

Now hear the good news: It is our sovereign God who initiates a relationship with us. God seeks us out long before we seek God. “The

Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” The Lord makes us his sheep, we don’t make him our shepherd. “Know that the Lord is God,” says the psalmist. “It is he that made us; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”

It is our rigorous observation of scripture over a lifetime that plants our feet firmly on the rock, and keeps us mindful of the nature and character of God, and helps us remember that Jesus came to show us the Father. That same practice inspired Isaac Watts to reflect on the nature of the shepherd’s love for us. Listen to the final verse...

Your sure provisions, gracious God, attend me all my days.  
O may your house be my abode, and all my work be praise,  
Here would I find a settled rest, while others go and come;  
No more a stranger, nor a guest, but like a child at home.

--My Shepherd You Supply My Need