**Among My Sheep**

Based on [John 10:22-30](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn10.22-30)

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During the feast of dedication, more popularly known today as Hanukkah, Jesus was in Jerusalem walking in the temple. And the Jews, (meaning those Jews who reject Jesus), ask Jesus to tell them plainly if he is the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour. Jesus says **I have told you already, but you don’t believe because you are not “among my sheep**.” And how do people become Jesus’ sheep? Jesus says, “**My Father has given them to me, that’s how; and no one can snatch them out of his Almighty hand.”**

And so, There are three things Jesus teaches in our Gospel lesson today. 1. Reason people don’t believe is because they are not “among Jesus’ sheep”; 2. Reason they are not “among Jesus sheep” is because the Father has not given them to him. 3. The flock is eternally protected by the Almighty hand of God.

In this wonderful word of scripture, Jesus tells us why it is that some people don’t believe in him. It’s not because he has failed to market himself properly. **It’s not because he wasn’t mission-minded enough; or because he refused to reach people “where they were at.” In fact many reject him because his teachings are too close to home.** No, the reason the Jews did not believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God, is because they are not, and I quote: “among his sheep.” In other translations, they are not “part of his flock.”

What is a flock?...it’s a group of sheep who graze together; who have the same Shepherd and who share the same pasture. When Jesus says, you don’t believe because "You are not part of my flock", he’s saying "You are not part of my church." **Now Jesus didn’t hold a Sunday morning service, of course. But the “Church” is simply where Jesus is preached and people come together to receive him.** Jesus is saying, “My sheep believe me because they are in the flock, they graze in my pasture of people gathered in faith around Word and Sacrament.”

There is a sense nowadays, that Christians have direct access to God’s grace anywhere we want it, and anytime we ask for it. Whether it’s in our pajamas at home, or in the pews at church. **And it’s true, we can pray to God anytime anywhere for daily bread.** We can pray anytime, anywhere for forgiveness and grace, but he promises to deliver these things “**among his sheep**.”

People are fine to think that you need to go to the grocery store to get your daily bread; but scandalized to hear that you need to go to church to receive your daily grace; why? You can pray to God for daily bread, and he gives it to you through producers and farmers and distributors. **But if you shun the supermarket in expectation of immediate bread from heaven,** you would be testing God. **We wouldn't pray to God to fill our bellies by a direct immediate miracle...why would we pray he fill our faith by such a miracle then?** Why do we think that he will directly fill our faith from anywhere, when He says, **“Here are my things that my sheep gather around.” My pasture is my Word and sacrament. You don't hear my voice, well no wonder...you are not part of my flock.** And he says that is your own negligence and indifference and resistance that keeps you from my flock and pasture, from being “among my sheep”.

This leads to another confusion that Jesus clears up for us today as well. If belief is sustained “among Jesus sheep”--in other words if the way we can get people to believe is get them in the church--then, some think, **let’s do anything and everything we can to get them in the church.** The problem with that is... 2. **Only the Father gives Jesus sheep**. And there are no new strategic, market-minded methods that can force the Father to do this apart from his plan.

Johnny Cash died in 2003, and for the last few years of his life, he became really popular with people of my generation. Not sure why, and it doesn’t really matter. The point is he became popular...his stock was on the rise. **And so Burger King bought rights to use one of his most famous songs to sell their onion rings. You guessed it “Ring of Fire.”** This fast food Burger King corporate chain played “I fell in to a burning ring of fire”, as they flashed a plate of greasy sizzling onion rings accompanied by fast moving camera shots and a sales pitch.

Now, what does Johnny Cash have to do with Burger King? What does the ring of fire have to do with onion rings? Absolutely nothing. Burger King has nothing to do with rockabilly country music. Rockabilly country music shares nothing with the vision of fast food franchising, besides the very common denominator in making money. The tactic is called marketing; and marketing is the practice of **not allowing a product to sell on its own merit alone.**

People have been trying to market Christianity for centuries...since before the world was “post-Christian.” Beginning in the mid 1800s, some Christian salesmen were convinced that the Gospel of Jesus Christ needed a shot in the arm. **People were going to church, hearing the word and receiving Communion, but it just wasn’t attractive enough. Salesmen know how to get people aroused, and so they set up camps, where thousands of people would get together; listen to loud bombastic preachers; amp up on emotional expression; and express themselves individualistically by whooping and hollering**. Barking like dogs was a common thing at these camp revivals. The idea was that you could tell the Holy Spirit was present by the excitement of the crowds. Ironic isn’t it, how Christianity paved the way for the modern rock concert?

“Revivalism” is the idea that, since people are more likely to make rash decisions when their emotions are high; **the best way to get reluctant people to become Christian is to play to their emotions. Then they are easier to sell to**. Revivalists are masters at packaging the gospel for consumers to make an “impulse buy.” Revivalists, though, never counted on one other market phenomenon--buyer’s remorse. An impulse buy of the Gospel does not calm troubled consciences. A contract signed under emotional duress is not legally binding. Maybe certain measures can motivate people to bleat for a time; but only the Father can make sheep for Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen, the intentions might be good. The thought being, “if we need to get people into church “among God’s sheep” to be saved; let’s just give church a makeover. **Let’s get rid of teaching doctrine and creeds and sacraments, which require people’s heart to follow their head, not lead.** But there's a problem with this approach. The problem is that marketing strategies don't give people to Jesus. Jesus says, "**My Father has given my sheep to me.**" He says, "**No one can come to me unless my Father who sent me draws him**" (John 6:44).

Marketing techniques can work wonders at achieving statistical goals...**like increasing the number of heinys in the pews on Sunday, or contributions in the offering plate.** Marketing techniques can motivate otherwise lazy people to get to work by calling it “play**”...like Tom Sawyer tricking another boy into painting the fence for him.** Marketing techniques can give God a makeover, airbrush and eyeliner. Marketing can make men bow down to him; can make women drool over him. **The problem is that marketing is a technique of man not of God; it’s manipulation not mission.** The problem is that the Christian salesman has simply sold the consumer the Market, not the Maker who is blessed forever and ever, Amen.

Marketing is "**the provision of goods or services to meet customer or consumer needs**." And so, when Jesus says to these Jews, "**You do not believe because you are not among my sheep**," what he’s saying is that “my goods do not meet your needs.” Isn’t that an amazing thing for Jesus to say? He says to them, “**Your needs are to be flattered by the Christ. Your needs are to find a Christ who will march in with a sword to the tune of the Battle Hymn of the Republic.** You are wanting me to market *to you*...but my only product is my flesh and blood *for you*. I have nothing else to put on the market, and there is nothing else by which my Father will draw sheep.”

Friends in Christ, Jesus says, “**I offer nothing but *salvation* by the Father, through Me, and if you are looking for some other product...some inspirational Johnny Cash music, a special feeling, or a conformity to your preconceived notions, then no wonder**. No wonder you don't listen to me when I have already told you plainly that I am the Christ. No wonder you see my works and roll your eyes. **You don't want me to change you; you want me to change and market myself to you...well I'm not going to do it.** You won't see my gospel on a burger king commercial. I won't lure you in with a Johnny Cash jingle. I am who I am, and I am the Father are one, **and the reason you don't believe it is because you are not among my sheep.**

That’s what Jesus says to the Pharisees, the scoffers, those who don’t believe in Christ because **they are shopping in the wrong marketplace**. But you, holy people of God, you are set apart. You are the sheep of his fold; the lamb of his flock. God gives you eternal life from this very altar **as you receive the forgiveness of sins; shoulder to shoulder...among his sheep, part of his flock.** No gimmicks, no games, just Gospel straight from the voice of the Good Shepherd himself, who leads you to green pastures for His Name’s sake. **The pasture protected by the hand of God himself, the one who is greater than all**, and no one is able to snatch you out of the Father’s hand.