

Acts 9:36-43

John 10:22-30

## Introduction

Last week I went to visit a parishioner at Addenbrookes Hospital and I had extraordinary difficulty in getting to see her. I had to prove who I was and people wouldn't tell me where she was. Eventually with the help of the chaplaincy I managed to find her and do my visit. So now I am registering with the Chaplaincy so they know my identity and can allow me access. I spent a large part of yesterday morning filling in the form for my DAB – disclosure and barring check. The form was all about proving that I was who I said I was. What names did I go under, where had I lived. Who was I really?

During Jesus' ministry one of the recurring themes of his relationship with the Jewish leaders was their demand to know who Jesus really was. Was he who he said he was? What authority did he have to do the things he did and say the things he said? In our Gospel reading today we again see the Jews challenging him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah tell us plainly'. He was being asked to prove himself to them and his response is very interesting he says two things:

**Firstly** "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, **And then**<sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Jesus tells his questioners that he has no need to prove himself. The things he does testify to who his is. His miracles, the healings, his forgiveness of sins, his power over evil spirits and over the powers of nature all proclaim him to be who he is. He has proved himself not only in word but also in action. ... But they did not believe him.

And the reason he gives that they do not believe is because they are not his sheep. They don't belong to his flock. How does he know that – because his sheep listen to his voice; He knows them and they follow him.

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As many of you know I have a new cat, a very shy rescue cat who has been deeply traumatized. I had to keep him in the house for 8 months until he had learned to trust me and not be afraid of his home or of me. I let him out on Easter Monday for the first time and one of my fears was that he would not come back if I called him. To my joy he knows my voice and whenever I call comes bounding back confidently showing his trust for me and expecting a treat or his meal. He knows my voice and comes to me.

In Jesus' ministry he called people to follow him. Some responded and some didn't. Those who followed him were the ones who listened to what he said and recognized in his works of power the proof of who he was. These were Jesus' sheep. The ones didn't believe could not recognize him as the Messiah because they didn't listen to him and therefore had no understanding or trust.

Jesus' follower's, his disciples who spent three years following him and learning from what he taught them and what he did, had learned from him and learned to listen to him. This was very evident after the resurrection and after they had been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We see Peter and other disciples preaching the Gospel with confidence, assurance and power. We see them performing miracles and responding to situations in the way that Jesus had done. I am struck by an incident early on in the Acts of the Apostles when Peter and John were approached by a lame beggar outside the Temple courts. Peter's response was, *"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."*<sup>7</sup> *Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.*<sup>8</sup> *He jumped to his feet and began to walk."*

The apostles had not only listened to Jesus they had learned from him and put what they had learned into action so that people would hear the Good News of Salvation and come to know Jesus for themselves. We see this happening very powerfully in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles where a

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follower of Jesus, called Dorcas, who was known for her good works and love of others became ill and died. The fellowship in Joppa where she lived knew Peter was in the vicinity and they had probably heard that he had been healing people so they sent for him to see if he could help.

This incident has very strong echoes of a healing that Jesus had done during his ministry, that of Jairus' daughter.

In both, the individual had died before the one asked to help had got there.

In both, the room was filled with weeping mourners.

In both, everyone was asked to leave the room and the door closed behind them.

When alone with Dorcas' body Peter got down on his knees and prayed. He was asking for Jesus help and guidance – but he was listening too; listening to what the Holy Spirit told him to do. He clearly heard and acted on what he heard.

His actions were an echo of Jesus' actions when he healed Jairus' daughter

In the account in Mark chapter 5 we read:

*After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!").*

*<sup>42</sup> Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.*

*<sup>43</sup> He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

In our reading from Acts we read:

*<sup>40</sup> Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive.*

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The words in these verses are almost identical. Jesus said "Talitha koum" and Peter said "Tabitha koum"

What we see here is Peter, having followed Jesus for three years, watching, listening and learning not only had seen Jesus heal people and transform situations but had learned how, by listening to the Holy Spirit and through his power to do the same things.

Last week we heard how Jesus forgave Peter for denying that he even knew him the night before he died. He forgave him, healed the pain and guilt Peter had been carrying and reinstated him as 'the rock on which Jesus intended to build his church'. He told "Peter feed my sheep". He gave him the role of caring for Jesus' followers and here in this incident from acts we see how far Peter had come from that shameful night. Jesus had said, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me".

So what can we learn from this?

Well the first and most important things is that as disciples of Jesus we need to hear his voice and follow him. In order to hear and recognize someone's voice we need to spend time with them. To listen to what they say and through that learn to know them and to recognize them. What we are aiming for is that affirming experience when we phone someone we know and love and simply say, "it's me" they immediately know who we are. In order for that to happen they need to spend time with us, to get to know us and be used to listening to us.

If we want to be able to recognize Jesus' voice when he speaks to us, which he does, we need to spend time praying and simply listening, to test out when we think we hear Jesus speaking to us, "Is that you Lord", tentatively trying it out by putting into action the things we think we hear Jesus telling us to do and then as we become more familiar with hearing him speak to us developing the faith to do what we think we hear him telling us to do.

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We may not be called to heal people in the way Peter did, though I wouldn't rule it out! As you know I have occasionally found that God has led me to do that. But as we learn to listen to God's voice and begin to respond to what we hear him saying to us we will find him directing us and leading us and transforming us with his power and love.