

John 10:22-42 – Words and Works¹

Before the lesson: Have blank paper and pens/pencils for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

What singer or actor’s voice do you recognize immediately?

What is one regional thing that you identify yourself with? (a regional food, sports team, event, civic organization, etc.)

Information

Some people have very distinctive voices. Was Jesus’ voice distinctive? Was it deep and dramatic? Did he have a distinctive accent? We are not told these things. This was not an important issue as far as the gospel writers were concerned. However, in the gospel of John, Jesus talks about his voice.

Here is the setting: Jesus is in the temple in Jerusalem. It is in the winter, during the festival time that we call Hanukkah. Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday that is not an explicitly religious holiday, as is the Day of Atonement or Passover. Hanukkah is a nationalistic holiday. In the second century BC, between the Old Testament days and the New Testament days, the Jews revolted against the occupying Syrians. A Jewish priest named Judas Maccabeus led the revolt. The Jews reclaimed the Temple, tore down the statue of Zeus that the Syrians had erected, ritually cleansed the temple, and held an eight-day celebration. The Jews of Jesus’ day celebrated Hanukkah, just as the Jews of today do. It is a time to celebrate the Jews as a people and to remember when Jews expunged those who once ruled over them. Flash forward 200 or so years, and the Jews, including Jesus and his disciples, are celebrating.

- Have a class member read John 10:22-27.

Who were the people who questioned Jesus? (“the Jews”) In Luke’s gospel, it is the high priest who presents this challenge to Jesus. But John broadens the base. After all, who was in the temple if not Jews, and who was celebrating this festival if not Jews? And, in some ways, the Jews of Jesus’ day and the Jews of Judas Maccabaeus’ day were in the same situation. A foreign power, in this case, Rome, ruled their land.

Generally speaking, Jews of the day were looking for the Messiah. And on Hanukkah, with the memory of their forefathers challenging an oppressive government, questions about a coming Messiah who would deliver his people from Roman occupation would come naturally. It seems,

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however, that the persons questioning Jesus were not as curious as they were calculating. At the very least, they were frustrated. Who was this man, they wondered.

Let's hear what happened just before this festival.

- Have a class member read John 10:14-21.

What is it that the Jews want Jesus to make clear? (his identity; if he is or is not the Messiah) Jesus offers an entirely different image of who he is – a shepherd.

You can't get two roles much further apart than a shepherd and the Messiah, particularly as they saw the Messiah – a political powerhouse with military might. A shepherd had no political power and fought off thieves or animals with rocks and sticks. The Jews were sure that the coming Messiah would take lives. What would happen to Jesus, as the good shepherd? (he would lose his life; he would give his life up for the sheep, etc.)

The Messiah would be the savior of the Jews, but Jesus says that there are other sheep he also came to save. Who do you think Jesus meant? (the Gentiles – those who were not Jews; generations born after the ascension of Jesus; etc.)

John says that “the Jews were divided” over Jesus' words. Some credited his power to demons. Others argued that, at the very least, Jesus was not demon-possessed, because a demon could not heal a blind man.

Let's listen to the story they were thinking of.

- Have a class member read John 9:1-11.

One thing to notice about this text is the role of *words* and the role of *works*. Jesus, sometimes, merely spoke words for a healing to occur. In this situation, though, there are works – creating a paste, putting the paste on the eyes, and taking a dip in a pool. We are not told why healings happen in one way or the other. Either way, John refers to supernatural stories as signs or as works. They were beneficial to the recipient, of course. Moreover, they were also evidence of Jesus' identity and his clear purpose.

But, it was not clear to those who did not or could not believe in him.

- Have a class member read John 9:16.

Let's return to our original passage, then. Consider the story of the blind man's healing, the religious leaders' rejection, and Jesus' claim to be a sacrificial shepherd as we hear this passage again:

- Have a class member read John 10:24-27.

Jesus says he has offered words and he has offered works as evidence of his identity. They rejected both. How did they reject his words? (ignored them; rejected them; twisted their meaning, etc.) How did they reject Jesus' works? (denied they happened; attributed Jesus' power to demonic powers, etc.)

What do you think was within them that blocked them from accepting Jesus for who he was?

Jesus knew he was going to give up his life for his sheep. What happens to sheep when there is no shepherd? (they scatter; they get lost; they are attacked with ease by wolves; they are easily stolen by thieves, etc.)

Jesus knew sheep and he knew human nature. Once the Roman authorities took him, he must have assumed that all would scatter in fear. At least one would deny being in Jesus' fold. So, Jesus told them something that might sustain them for those terrible three days.

- Have a class member read John 10:27-30.

That last sentence was another clarifying identity statement, wasn't it? How do you think the religious leaders would react to that?

- Have a class member read John 10:31-33.

Jesus responds...

- Have a class member read John 10:37-39.

The clearer Jesus states his identity, the angrier the religious leaders become. Why?

Transformational Exercise

Jesus is under attack. He is being threatened, pushed around, and bullied. He has "come to his own, but his own people reject him." (John 1:11)

Rejection can cause us to take a step back, to reassess our position, maybe to reaffirm our position. Jesus escapes another attempt to cause him physical harm, then he goes on a little retreat.

- Have a class member read John 10:40-42.

Why do you feel Jesus chose this spot for his retreat?

[Distribute pen and paper.]

Throughout this lesson, we've seen how Jesus' words and works reveal his identity. But Jesus, even, feels a need to go back to the place where it all started. That place, that event, defined him.

What places and events have defined your faith pilgrimage? Use this paper to name or sketch places and events that have been most formative for you. After a little time, I will invite you to share one of those places or events with a neighbor.

[After some time for reflection and writing...]

I'd like to invite you to share with a neighbor a story of one place or event that has helped to define your identity as a follower of Jesus.

[After time for sharing, call the class back together.]

What was that experience like for you? Did you have things in common? What is one thing you gained from hearing your neighbor's story?

[Close in a prayer something like this:] *Help us, O God, as we seek to identify ourselves with you more and more clearly. May our words and our works be good. May they point others to you. Amen.*