

WHERE IS JESUS? – John 10: 22-30

Greetings once again in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our story today is set at the Temple in Jerusalem. John, who loves to set his stories against the backdrop of **traditional Jewish feasts**, tells us that **Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication**. It is mid-December, so the equivalent for us would be **mid-June, or winter-time**, where the **temperature** in Israel often gets down to **9C at night and is only 18C by day**.

So, where was Jesus? Jesus was in the **portico**: we might call it the **porch** or the **veranda of the Temple**, for the portico is designed to **offer protection** from winter weather. The Festival of Dedication was a positive time for remembering a great event in Israel's history. In 164BC, Judas Maccabeus had **rescued the Temple from being used as a pagan shrine** by the Syrians, and he had re-dedicated it to the Lord; hence the title of the celebration, the Festival of Dedication. **So, where was Jesus? Against the backdrop of the Temple, Jesus, the True Temple, was standing on the porch.**

The central issue of this story addresses **the status of Jesus**. Quite simply, the religious leaders of the day want to know **whether Jesus is the Messiah**. They have their suspicions that there is **something special** about him, but they are not sure how to act. You put yourself in their situation, **where someone is hinting that they are the Messiah – you don't want to make a mistake, do you?**

Imagine that Jesus came into our church today, and we told him to go home and have a shower before he comes to our church again, because his **clothing was dirty and smelling of the fish** he had eaten for breakfast. That would be **one very huge mistake** ... it wouldn't very look good, would it?

So, the religious leaders pondered: **Are you the Messiah, Jesus?** You have called yourself the Good Shepherd, and we know that **King David was a shepherd**, so maybe you are. Are you the Messiah, Jesus? They tell us that you are **causing strange things to happen**: the blind are receiving sight, the hungry are being completely fed with hardly any food. "Are you the Messiah, Jesus?" they asked him. **"Please, give us an answer in plain language."**

The expected model of the Messiah was the warrior who would liberate Israel from her enemies, who in the past 90 years had been the Romans. That is a long time to be occupied by a foreign power. We cannot underestimate the pressure that the people of Israel felt during this time, **so desperately wanting to be liberated, and so helpless in the face of the might of Rome.**

Tell us plainly, Jesus. Are you the Messiah?

Jesus often spoke in parables and figurative language. It could be a little frustrating trying to follow him when he didn't use plain words.

"Don't waste our time, please Jesus. Stop stringing us along."

They gathered around him, but in a threatening manner. **When Grandpa says to the grandchildren, "Gather around kids. I'm going to tell you a story,"** they will encircle him, **hungry to hear his words and to devour his wisdom**. The religious leaders of the day were also encircling Jesus, but more like a **pack of wild dogs**. Yes, they were **hungry to hear his words**, but they **really wanted to devour his integrity rather than his wisdom**.

They wanted blood. They want grounds to arrest him. They wanted Jesus to admit clearly to them that he was the Messiah, so they could try him on charges of **blasphemy**. **They pretended to desire the truth, but really, they wanted a scalp**. While Grandchildren might be sustained by

wisdom and love and smiles, religious leaders who feel threatened are sustained by **blood and convictions**.

Jesus said that he had responded to their question in a plain manner. “I did tell you, and I did show you, but you didn’t believe me. I told you, and **the works that I did in my Father’s name testify to me.**” But you wouldn’t listen. You hardened your hearts. You refused to believe. You **closed** your eyes and put your **fingers in your ears** ... little wonder you struggle to hear the Shepherd’s voice.

Jesus went further, to make sure that they understood why they didn’t believe him. “**My sheep belong to me. My sheep hear my voice. My sheep follow me,**” said Jesus. My sheep will never perish. No-one can snatch them from me. The wolves might snatch a sheep after the shepherd has abandoned the flock. **Well organised gangs may steal cars and mobile phones in Melbourne today,** football teams might steal a win after trailing all day ... **but no-one will snatch a precious sheep while Jesus the Good Shepherd is looking after his flock.**

Jesus finally gave them the words they were after: “**For the Father and I are one.**” Those words caused immense difficulties for the religious authorities, and the early church also had to spend many hours trying to work out exactly what they meant, as well.

I find it helpful to think about my own family, when I hear the words, “**The Father and I are one,**” for I had a father also. That’s why we discussed ‘**Blood being thicker than water**’ earlier.

So, when Jesus says that the Father and I are one, we have to understand the magnitude of that statement. Here is a man standing on the porch of the Temple talking to the religious leaders of his day. When he tells them that he, and the Creator of the Universe, are one, he tells them that a special relationship exists between himself and Creator God. This is huge. It is not surprising that they wanted to kill him. That is quite a claim to make. But where was Jesus when he made that claim? He was on the porch of his Father’s house, where he belonged.

But, where is Jesus today? Sometimes we know his presence, oh, so strongly.

The **heart of Jesus** loves me unconditionally.

The **foot of Jesus** kicks me in the backside when I say the wrong thing.

The **hand of Jesus** squeezes my shoulder in a time of sorrow or pain.

The **ear of Jesus** hears my exasperated cry.

And the voice of Jesus speaks words of encouragement into my fragile spirit.

Where was Jesus then? Nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus was standing on the porch of his Father’s house, in the shelter, protected from the wind, protected from any physical attacks, and telling those present that, “The Father and I are one.”

But, where is Jesus now? He has left the Temple porch, and he is now dwelling within your hearts. While you may, from time to time, forget that you are one of his sheep ... he will never forget that he is your shepherd. He will hold you, and love you, and protect you, forever.

Jesus the Messiah, righteous and victorious one, is one with you, today.

Amen.