

Sermon Preached by: Pastor Stephen Haar

Location: [St Peter's Lutheran Church, Loxton](#)

Text: [John 10:22-30](#)

Theme: *'It was winter—a season of the heart.'*

Date: 11th May 2025, Easter 4 [C]

The Bible says, *"It was winter."* What does 'winter' mean to you? What is the worst winter you can remember? Was it drab grey skies that offered no real light or colour? Wind that stung and turned the skin red? Cold that wrapped like a blanket but allowed no warmth and seemed to take life away? The numbness of your body: fingers and toes that had lost their feeling? The crunchiness of a hard and frozen ground? Leafless trees and bare backyards that showed no sign of life or growth?

We have all experienced winters, and if we are not careful, we will hear John's words, *"It was winter,"* as just a statement about the weather and the time of year. But John is not simply describing a season of the year. He is describing a season of life, a season of faith. That *'it is winter'* is not a comment on the weather—it is a diagnosis of the interior condition, the faith, of those who had gathered for the Feast of Dedication.

The Feast of Dedication, or what we may more commonly refer to as Hanukkah, celebrates the day that Israel liberated Jerusalem in 164BC, and regained control of the temple that had been desecrated by the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes. Then the people reconsecrated the temple to the one true God, of Israel.

For nearly 200 years the people had gathered each year. Year after year they remembered, they celebrated that day the temple was reconsecrated to God. However, at the same time, they failed to reconsecrate—give themselves back—to God. They stood frozen in the past; their hardened hearts unable to hear Jesus' words, understand his works, or recognize who he was.

They failed to receive the real freedom and life of God in the here and now – celebrated in Jesus changing of water into wine; in the feeding of the 5000; in the healing of the lame and sick; in the raising of Lazarus; in the commandment to love God and each other.

However, this is not only a problem for people in our Gospel story: this is your problem and mine. This is the human problem in relationship with God. Far too often we consecrate, we set aside and give our exterior temples to God, but keep our hearts for ourselves.

- So, doctrine becomes
a means of exclusion rather than a path to God.
- Scripture becomes a weapon
rather than the revelation of God's life with God's people.

- Neighbours become enemies to be feared and destroyed
instead of enemies becoming neighbours through love.
- Life becomes ritual *instead of sacramental.*

And why not?

Why not simply consecrate our exterior temples? After all, it is always easier, safer, and more comfortable to consecrate the external parts of our lives than it is to risk consecrating our hearts, our interior temples, to God. To consecrate our interior temples would change:

- how we see,
- hear,
- know,
- believe,
- and live.

It would be unsettling, uncomfortable to say the least.

As long as we fail to consecrate ourselves, our life **and** heart— (*all that we are and all that have we have*) we will stand with the crowd saying to Jesus, *"Tell us plainly, are you the Messiah or are you just another foreigner that needs to be thrown out of our temple?"*

The response of Jesus is always the same: *"I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."*

Jesus is not excluding anyone here ... We do that to ourselves. If we do not belong it is only because we do not hear—as evidenced by the request, *"Tell us plainly."*

"Tell us plainly" is more a statement about our hearing and listening than it is about Jesus' words and speaking. *"Tell us plainly"* are the words of a frozen people—the voice of those **less** into faith and **more** into fact, **less** into restoration and **more** into maintenance.

- It is the winter in our hearts.
- It is the winter in our spirit.
- It is the winter in our seeing and hearing.
- It is the winter in our believing and knowing.
- It is the worst winter we can experience.

'Tell us plainly' reveals that we have become too comfortable in our faith, too comfortable in consecrating only our exterior temples. That's the demand of those who don't wish to be made *uncomfortable* by the unknowns of faith.

"Give us undeniable proof!" they cry.

"Give us signs and wonders!" they cry.

And there it is—we instinctively prefer comfort to risk.

It is Winter—and Winter has frozen us in comfort; frozen our hearts as a barrier against risk and trust. Yet Jesus is saddened by our condition, and, says troubling things:

"I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep."

There is danger in reading these words that we simply assume... **we are** "the sheep;" and, that Jesus has given his sheep eternal life; and has promised that no one will snatch them out **his** or **the Father's hand**.

BUT, aren't the sheep also the ones who **listen** to his voice and **follow** Jesus into *uncertainty* and into *risk*? Aren't they **the dependent ones** who trust in the Shepherd, rather than demand of him, *"Tell us plainly?"* Aren't they called by his voice **into the unknowns** of faith?

Jesus knew discomfort. Jesus was often uncomfortable.

And if those are the experiences of the Shepherd, are they also not the experiences of the sheep? And isn't **comfort** what so often seeks to snatch us from the Shepherd? Isn't **comfort** what keeps us **frozen**? Perhaps this is the reason why Jesus says shocking things to us like:

- Sell everything you have and give it to the poor.
- Forgive 70 times 7.
- Love one another as I have loved you.
- Blessed are the poor, those who mourn... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... the pure in heart, the peacemakers... those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.
- Do not worry about your life, or tomorrow; sell your possessions and give to the poor; take up your cross; show mercy like the Good Samaritan; follow me.

If that does not make us *squirm just a bit*, feel uneasy, maybe we need to re-examine our lives and priorities; perhaps our core-heart-temperature is starting to fall.

The risky, uncomfortable faith to which Jesus calls us is nothing less than embracing God's own life, eternal life, right here, right now, in this world—in your life and in my life.

This is a quality of life that never perishes. It makes us the "unsnatchable" people of God.

We experience this truth—that 'nothing can or will snatch us from Jesus' hand' —in many ways:

- In having imagination which keeps creating even when it has been rejected too many times,
- In the ability to love again, even in the wake of heartbreak,
- In the courage to risk once more even when things didn't work out as hoped the last time; or the time before that.

- Perhaps it is in the wonder that faith does not fail us even when evidence for believing seems thin.
- Indeed, maybe it is being given a heart which is open to the pain of the world, and which keeps seeking to respond even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges...
- And maybe it is in the ability to keep singing even as suffering and death seem to be winning the day.

Surely this is a promise we need to hear, take to heart, and speak again and again: *this certainty that nothing can snatch us from God's hand*. Whatever else may be true, I know that I have experienced the truth of this promise in my own life—especially during 'Winter-time'.

During the Easter season there are special words we share in church that are part of our celebration of the Lord's Supper. They say: "*Christ has Risen, Christ is Risen. Christ will come again. Come Lord Jesus come.*"

This is our victory shout! We have been called to risky, uncomfortable faith; yet, at the same time to the certainty of an ***un-snatchable*** relationship with the Good Shepherd:

- *Certainty that enables us* to be and do, to risk and to grow, to love deeply and long.
- *Certainty that enables us* as we live and die in faith in Jesus Christ our Saviour
- *Certainty that enables us* to live and grow into all God calls us to be.

And surely this promise — his promise and assurance— spells, for us, the end of Winter!!