

Fourth Sunday of Easter

SEARCHING FOR SECURITY IN AN UNSAFE WORLD

John 10:22-30

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Analysis by Ron Starenko

22At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, 23and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 24So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." 25Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; 26but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 27My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. 30The Father and I are one."

DIAGNOSIS: Unsafe

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Threats All Around*

Leave it to television to remind us every day that we live in an unsafe world. We get close-up accounts of terrorist attacks, auto and plane crashes, storms and earthquakes, epidemics, crazies blasting away with automatic weapons, volatility in the stock market, and an on-going national argument over guns or no guns, all a sure sign that we are always unsafe. The oft-repeated phrase about being "safe and sound" rings hollow these

days. We are, as St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, “like sheep to be slaughtered” (8:36b).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Idols and Illusions No Help*

Truth be known, we are helpless in the face of the forces arrayed against us. Our heroes fail us. Ultimately, a parent, a lover, a job, our government, our achievements and possessions, cannot guarantee our safety. Our idols and illusions can never come through for us. Our insecurity remains. As a matter of fact, our false trust puts us in even greater danger, when we fear everything but God

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Not Even Safe from God*

Ultimately, as bad as this sounds to our illusory ears, we are not even safe from God. Jesus wasn't! His cry from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46b) is the final danger, how unsafe we are when God slaughters the shepherd and the sheep. That is our biggest problem, not being safe from God, who blocks our path, who undercuts our efforts to find a lasting security, who finally snatches our life from us one way or another. In the death and dying that curses our world, complicit as we are in the process, God is turning us over to our destructive ways. We deserve to be abandoned, and we have no answer for that.

PROGNOSIS: Secure

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Enter the Good Shepherd*

Let that sink in, at least long enough to hear the good news. There is a word that talks back, that trumps the bad news, as God is able to get in the last word, how God is able to undo God's just judgment against us, how God will love us, the doomed sheep, willing to slaughter the Shepherd, dirty, bloody, and

wounded—instead of us, and then bring him back from the dead. The sheep will be saved and safe because Jesus will take our eternal insecurity before God and make it his, exchanging his blameless life for our inescapable shame, taking our unsafe-ness and suffering it away, securing for us a permanent place in God's sheepfold, welcoming us into the security of the Father's love.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Voicing the Promise

Who, then, can snatch us “out of the Father's hand” (v. 29)? We have Jesus' own promise for that, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand” (vv. 27-28). This is the good news we hear today, to receive and believe, that we are safe and secure, embraced by the Shepherd, who claims us as his own in our baptism, who gathers and feeds us, his beloved, in the Supper of the Lamb. The promise is echoed in the New Testament lesson for this day, the Revelation of John, when the great multitude, including us, standing before the Lamb, robed in white” (7:9b), will be washed in the blood of the Lamb; how God will today and tomorrow and forever “shelter them,” (and) “they will hunger no more and thirst no more...for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (vv. 15b-17), all secure in an eternally safe world.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Sending Us into the Fray

We all know that what is already is also not yet. The world we know is imploding. Insecurity continues to be the sign of the times. The lambs are still being slaughtered. We are never safe, and yet, we are always safe in the Good Shepherd's embrace, always “being killed all day long; ... accounted as sheep to be

slaughtered ... [yet being] "more than conquerors through him who loved us"... [knowing that nothing] "in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:36-37, 39b). Therefore, we are able to get through all insecurity and live out our callings in the fray as good shepherds, sometimes wounded—parents, grandparents, citizens, career people, community workers, and church members—who do what we are able to make the world safer, by caring for the sheep, the lambs. The bottom line is we get to order our lives and make our choices, living and dying and rising again in Jesus, knowing that no one and nothing can snatch us from the Father's hand.