

April 21 2013

Scripture Lessons Acts 9:36-43
John 10:22-30

Sermon *Return of the Body Snatchers*

Chris made a sort of funny face when she saw the title of my sermon- “Return of the Body Snatchers.” This is not going to be too creepy, so don’t worry.

Some of you remember that the 1950 and 1960s, (I hardly remember them of course) were a time with movie theaters seemed to be filled with what I would call cheesy kind of science fiction films with sometimes very bad costumes and very bad sets and kind of corny special effects. My kids laugh at them to this day. And often times plot less story lines as well, but wasn’t it fun to go to them if you were a kid, or even as an adult in those days. *The Days of the Body Snatchers* and the sequel, *The Return of the Body Snatchers*, were two such movies where aliens somehow snatched, or they took over, the bodies of we poor earthlings for some sinister plan to take over the world.

Now Jesus, strangely enough, in this passage for today Jesus speaks of snatching too, but in a very different context in the Gospel lesson for today. Except in Jesus’ case, rather than some sinister end coming about because of what is happening, Jesus’ case is for comfort given to one of us as we are able to accept God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. This passage appears within a much larger chapter of images which features Jesus as a loving and vigilant shepherd and we as sometimes wayward sheep.

I am not for sure I want to be called a sheep, and maybe I will tell you why someday. But I more often picture Christians, and congregations, and pastors working together as an exercise in herding cats more than a picture of herding sheep. But nevertheless, the Bible talks more about shepherds than sheep, most often especially in John’s Gospel. This passage though, starts out in a very kind of unique way with its location in the temple court, and the time of the year being winter, and in the celebration of the Festival of Dedication or the Festival of Lights, or what we would know as Hanukkah. ,In fact in the research, as I did the research, this is the only time that this festival of Hanukkah is in fact mentioned in all of Scripture.

Jesus seems to be taking a walk here when he is sort of accosted or affronted by a group of Jewish religious leaders who want to force his hand, “How in the world, how long will you keep us in suspense,” they asked Jesus.” If you are the Messiah, then tell us plainly- come out with it.” And characteristically, Jesus

doesn't stop with a simple answer, he goes on to use words and images that I think are designed to challenge the questioners, to somehow look inside themselves and ponder their faith in a much deeper way. He doesn't answer them plainly with words and evidences and then sort of switches gears to use another image which employs shepherds and sheep. And he says very plainly "You do not believe I am who I am because you do not belong to my sheep." In other words, you are clueless about who I am because you have not yet been able to accept the love that God offers to you freely today.

He goes on to say when you are able to internalize how much God loves you, you will hear my voice, that is you will understand who I am and what I came to do. You will follow in my footsteps, and then using words similar to those found in John 3:16, Jesus says part of what it means follow in his footsteps is to realize this life which we live here on this earth is not a life, lived in any sense in vain.

Instead this life flows into an eternal life or on-going reality in which we will never just perish into nothing. This life then is lived for a reason and has eternal meaning and eternal consequences and each time we understand and share God's love around us as we live out our daily lives together there is more meaning given to our lives and meaning given to those lives around us as well.

Now in a sense all of this sounds sort of lofty and esoteric but this is the way that John writes and he is after all speaking of spiritual things which will have their reality long, long after we have left this earth and transitioned into the next life. But John's use of this great word snatch, I think, is far more concrete in his imaginary for us to grasp.

How many of you play some kind of ball in your lives? Be it basketball, football or whatever kind of ball. Anybody who plays any kind of ball knows what it means to snatch something. It implies far more than just grasping or grabbing after something. Snatching is a quick act which points to some kind of premeditation on the part of the one who snatches. To snatch something, purse snatching for example, means someone has thought the act through carefully and will rely on the element of surprise to get away with the prize that they are after. No such luck for the snatchers though when it comes to Jesus' tender care for each one of us.

The image is more than an image; it is more personal in scripture. Jesus holds us in his hand, no amount of preplanning; no amount of quickness will steal us away from God's love or those eternal and not perishing qualities that love can give each of our lives. So as we follow in his footsteps, and as we more and more show and accept and share the love and the hope and joy of God in our lives the more God's presence and care becomes a present reality in our everyday living. And the more that we will know with our whole hearts that nothing and no one can snatch us out of God's hand no matter what happens in this life. I think as I close

today St Paul's words from the eighth chapter in Romans says this best to us. St. Paul says, nothing, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. No matter what you will encounter in the course of this day or the rest of this week or from your life from here on out remember those words, nothing can snatch you out of God's hand. Together we say: Amen