

2025-05-11 4th Sunday of Easter - Lawton

SUMMARY

The discussion centers on the theme of being "Vorpal sheep," emphasizing the need for Christians to be active and obedient in their faith. Bishop Lawton draws parallels between different sheep breeds and the diverse roles Christians play in God's kingdom. The conversation highlights Jesus' interaction with Jewish leaders during the Feast of Hanukkah, where His miracles and teachings were rejected due to closed hearts. The story of Dorcas (Tabitha) in Acts is used to illustrate the power of faith and the importance of listening to and following God's voice. The message concludes with a call to action for believers to be open to God's guidance and to actively minister to others, trusting in God's transformative power.

BE ACTIVE:

- Cultivate a life of openness to God, listening to Him, and saying "yes" when He calls you to do something.
- Expect God to use you in powerful ways, as you grow in your "sheepness".
- Do not give up hope when people reject God's love and goodness, but press on, keeping your eyes on Jesus and going where He leads.

Outline

Discussion on Sheep and Their Varieties

- Bishop Lawton begins with a prayer, thanking God for His goodness and asking for the Holy Spirit to guide the conversation.
- The conversation shifts to the topic of sheep, with Bishop Lawton noting that people often think of sheep as dumb but acknowledges the variety of breeds and their different purposes.
- Bishop Lawton asks the audience to consider what kind of sheep God would want them to be, prompting a discussion on the different breeds and their characteristics.
- The term "Vorpal sheep" is introduced, referencing a character from Monty Python's "Holy Grail," and the audience is encouraged to think about the concept of a dangerous sheep.

Jesus' Encounter with Jewish Leaders

- **Bishop Lawton transitions to the Gospel of John, where Jesus is questioned by Jewish leaders about His identity as the Messiah.**
- **Jesus responds by stating that His works testify to who He is, but the leaders do not believe.**
- **The conversation highlights the miracles performed by Jesus, such as healing the blind, lame, and lepers, and raising the dead, which should have been evidence of His messianic status.**
- **The leaders' refusal to believe is attributed to their closed hearts, and Jesus emphasizes that His sheep know His voice and follow Him.**

The Story of Dorcas and Peter's Role

- **Bishop Lawton introduces the story of Dorcas (Tabitha) from the book of Acts, who was well-loved for her selfless acts of making clothing for others.**
- **Dorcas becomes ill, dies, and is brought back to life by Peter, who follows Jesus' example of healing and raising the dead.**
- **Peter's actions in Joppa are compared to Jesus' encounter with Jairus' daughter, where Jesus also raised someone from the dead after driving out the mourners.**
- **The power of God is demonstrated through Peter's actions, leading many to believe in the Lord.**

The Role of Sheep in the Kingdom of God

- **Bishop Lawton discusses the imagery of sheep in the Bible, emphasizing that being a sheep means being vulnerable and dangerous to the kingdom of Satan.**
- **The conversation highlights the importance of listening to God's voice and acting on it, using the example of Peter following Jesus' example.**
- **The audience is encouraged to be Vorpals, ready to rescue those in the kingdom of God, and to live out the mission entrusted to them by God.**
- **The discussion includes a reflection on the song "The Lord is My Shepherd" and the need to avoid a pastoral image that may not fully capture the true nature of being a sheep in God's kingdom.**

The Great Tribulation and the Role of Sheep

- **Bishop Lawton references Revelation 7, where John sees a multitude of people who have overcome the Great Tribulation and are standing before the throne of God.**
- **The conversation emphasizes that following Jesus involves enduring hardships and persevering through trials, as these people did.**
- **The audience is encouraged to follow Jesus with a burning passion, even if it means suffering and rejection, because the love of Jesus is greater than any worldly love.**
- **The importance of listening to God's voice and being transformed by His love is reiterated, with a call to action to live out the kingdom of God in the world.**

The Power of God in the Lives of Believers

- **Bishop Lawton discusses the power of God that is released through believers, using the example of Peter's actions in Lydda and Joppa.**
- **The conversation highlights that the power of God is meant to be seen in the lives of believers, leading many to believe in the Lord.**
- **The audience is encouraged to be open to God's guidance and to act on His instructions, even if it means stepping out of their comfort zones.**
- **The discussion includes a reflection on the importance of being available to God and ready to respond to His call, whether it involves healing, raising the dead, or other acts of ministry.**

The Responsibility of Believers to Minister to Others

- **Bishop Lawton emphasizes that believers are called to minister to others, starting with small acts of kindness and growing in their ministry.**
- **The conversation includes examples of how God has already used people in the room to pray for and heal others, encouraging the audience to have an expectation of God's use in their lives.**
- **The audience is warned that not everyone will receive God's love and goodness, but they are encouraged to keep their ears open to God and to continue ministering.**

- **The importance of persevering in faith and not giving up hope is highlighted, with a call to press on because they know their home is with God.**

The Call to Be Vorpals

- **Bishop Lawton concludes by encouraging the audience to be Vorpals, ready to rescue those in the kingdom of God and to live out the mission entrusted to them by God.**
- **The conversation includes a reflection on the importance of being open to God's guidance and ready to act on His instructions.**
- **The audience is encouraged to cultivate a life of openness to God and to say yes when He calls them to minister to others.**
- **The discussion ends with a prayer, asking God to help the audience be the kind of Vorpals that changes the world and to grow God's flock through their actions.**

Lessons

A. What can we learn from the examples of Peter and Dorcas about the power of God working through believers?

From Peter and Dorcas, we learn that believers can be powerful conduits of God's miraculous work when they:

1. Listen to God's voice and act in obedience
2. Serve others selflessly (like Dorcas making clothing for widows)
3. Demonstrate faith through actions, not just words
4. Are willing to step out in prayer and trust God's power
5. Use their spiritual gifts to minister to those in need

Peter raised Dorcas from the dead and healed Aeneas, which resulted in many people believing in the Lord. These examples show that when believers are surrendered to God, His power can flow through them to transform lives, heal the sick, and bring people to faith. The key is remaining humble, staying connected to God, and being available for His purposes.

B. How can we persevere in our faith and ministry, even when faced with rejection, and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus?

Based on the sermon, persevering in faith involves several key principles:

1. Remember that Jesus is worth any suffering you might endure. Your love for Christ should be greater than any rejection or hardship.
2. Stay focused on God's mission, not on people's responses. Not everyone will receive God's message, but that shouldn't discourage you from continuing to minister.
3. Listen constantly to God's voice and be ready to act on His instructions, starting with small acts of obedience and growing from there.
4. Cultivate an expectation that God will use you, even in challenging circumstances. Believe that you can be a "Vorpals sheep" - dangerous to the kingdom of darkness, not through aggression, but through loving, transformative ministry.
5. Keep your identity rooted in being a child of God. Your worth isn't determined by people's reactions, but by your relationship with Christ.
6. Pray continually, asking God to keep your heart open, transform you, and use you to bring His kingdom to others.

The key is maintaining a burning passion for Jesus that transcends temporary setbacks, always remembering that you're part of a larger mission to spread God's love and power.

C. How does the Lamb spoken of in Revelation relate to the sheep in the 23rd psalm

In the sermon, Bishop Lawton connects the Lamb from Revelation to the shepherd imagery of Psalm 23 by emphasizing that Jesus is both the Lamb of God and the Shepherd. The Lamb represents Jesus as the sacrificial savior who takes away sins, while also being the shepherd who leads and protects his flock. The key connection is that this Lamb/Shepherd is not just a passive caretaker, but an active leader who empowers his sheep (believers) to carry out his mission in the world. The imagery shifts from a peaceful pastoral scene to a powerful metaphor of believers being called to be "dangerous sheep" who transform the world through God's power.

D. Why is the 23rd Psalm only part of the picture

The 23rd Psalm provides a comforting image of God as a shepherd, but it doesn't capture the full calling of believers. As discussed in the sermon, being a sheep isn't just about being passively cared for, but about actively following God's voice and mission. The psalm emphasizes God's protection and provision, but doesn't highlight the believer's responsibility to be "dangerous" - to carry God's kingdom, minister to others,

and transform the world. True discipleship involves listening to God's voice, being willing to go where He leads, and participating in His mission of healing, saving, and setting people free.