

Easter 4C 2025
John 10:22-30
Psalm 23
The Rev. Dr. Kathy Kelly

A couple of years ago, the Scottish / English actor, David Tennant was in the news in London replying to Dr. Who fans who were screaming about who the next actor would be to play Dr. Who. Tennant played Dr. Who 20 years ago and his fans wanted him back.

If you don't follow Dr. Who, let me fill you in a bit. Fans are crazy about this show. It is a 60-year-old sci-fi TV show which I think of as the British Star Trek, a reference Dr. Who fans would find cringeworthy. To them Dr. Who is completely unique. And they are right. Dr. Who is a human looking alien. He's a 450-year-old "Time Lord" and he's very smart. Let the adventures begin.

The actor playing Dr. Who changes every 5 years or so because the character transforms - actually they use the word regeneration (interestingly, they also use the word incarnation!).

The writers have written into the mythology of the story that the character physically changes at some random time. This adds suspense but also allows them to keep the show going for 60 years and get fans excited about the announcement of which actor will play Dr. Who next! Sometimes he changes gender too. A few years ago, Dr. Who was played by a woman (Jodie Whittaker.)

Fans get so crazy about this topic of who will be the next actor to play Dr. Who that British tabloids become full of this one conversation when regeneration time comes. In one tabloid last time around, a fan poll was taken and David Tennant was voted 60% most likely to return to the role at the age of 51.

Here's what David Tennant said in reply to that question:

I've been asked a version of this question for the last 20 years - [Laughs] and I've learned through bitter experience that there's not any point in even answering it because whatever I say is spun by whoever wants to hear it. So there's no point in me denying it, there's no point in me confirming it, there's no point in me fudging it. Whatever I say will become whatever the Internet wants it to be. I mean, it would be quite a weird idea, and it's not something you'd necessarily expect from Doctor Who (for a previous actor to play the role again). So, I'm not going to try and give you more than that because, what's the point?!

Oddly enough, Tennant did come back for one or two episodes before the actual next Dr. Who stepped in (Ncuti Gatwa).

Like our quest to find out who the next actor will be to play Dr. Who, we humans have a tendency to get overwrought about pinning things down. We want to know who is in charge, who is responsible and who is going to make decisions that effect us. It's just human nature, but our faith asks us to act differently.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus is in a similar boat to David Tennant and his fans. He is being backed into a corner and asked to reveal his secrets about who he really is. Although, David Tennant is just an actor. Jesus is the real deal!

Throughout John's Gospel, responses to Jesus vary widely but there is a theme that constantly addresses identity. Through this, we are asked to consider our identity as well as the identity of Jesus or the Holy Spirit or God the Father.

We like this line of questioning. We want to know who Jesus is, who God is and what is going to happen to us. But in answer, Jesus simply asks us to trust and follow him.

In this particular part of the story from John's gospel today, he says that we will know through our faith.

Jesus is at the temple again, this time for the Festival of the Dedication which we know as Hanukkah. Some Jews gather around him and ask Jesus to put an end to the debate concerning his identity once and for all: "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" (10:24).

The problem, of course, is that regardless of what Jesus says or does, the debate does not end. Jesus responds by saying that he has already told them, and that the works he has done (in his Father's name) testify to [God], but they do not believe, and they don't believe because they do not belong to his sheep.

We believe. So we "get" Jesus. So we don't need to ask this question.

Today is Mother's Day and we send out lots of love to all the moms and some gentleness to those missing their moms.

I had the chance to visit my mom recently and it was a good visit. I have greatly enjoyed being a mom too. But I was left thinking of the not-so-great moments of motherhood. I can remember getting separated from mom in a public place like the grocery store or shopping center and the relief of our reunion when we found each other. I once lost Kate in a mall. She was about 4 or 5 and was playing inside these round clothes racks so we couldn't see her. She also hid in a closet once at a beach house causing us to call the sheriff and start a beachside search. The relief was greater as the parent, when we found each other. As children, we take for granted that Mom, and Dad, are always there.

This reminds me of the childhood game *Marco Polo*. Do you remember that one? *Marco Polo* can be played in a swimming pool or on land. The person who is "It" is usually blindfolded and placed in the center of a group of people. They call out, *Marco!* while the others call out, *Polo!* The "It" person tries to reach one of the group members and touch them. When they do, the person touched becomes the person who is "It" and the other rejoins the group.

In case you've ever wondered, Marco Polo was a Venetian merchant and considered the first explorer. He travelled through Asia along the Silk Road in the 13th Century (between 1271 and 1295) and wrote about his discoveries inspiring others to become explorers.

If you haven't played *Marco Polo*, maybe you have done a trust walk. A trust walk is kind of similar. You are blindfolded and led through an unfamiliar place by a person who can see. You are completely at the mercy of that person. You have to trust them and have faith that they will keep you from falling or getting hurt.

I've told the story before of the time I was leading an actual blind man and caused him to fall. I was mortified, but my friend Tim quickly forgave me and laughed it off. He was very used to falling and wasn't hurt this time.

These games and real experiences are all about trust. And they're about communication. There is always a call and a response, just like in our relationship with God.

Like a lost lamb, we call out to God and listen for God's call for us. We go back and forth like the *Marco Polo* game so that we draw closer and closer to one another. We trust God to lead us through the valley of the shadows and guide us along right pathways. In goodness and mercy, God pursues us, and in that relationship we are cared for like the sheep of a shepherd. God draws near to us and we trust and follow. Or at least we try to trust and follow. Sometimes we have to work at it.

In Lent, we wandered in the wilderness, following Jesus all the way to Golgotha. In Eastertide, we find ourselves seeking the resurrected Jesus in a completely different landscape. In our own lives, practicing resurrection daily means that we try to pay attention to different things than does the rest of the world.

In our gospel story today, Jesus does works in God's name and makes it clear that he and God are united in the work that they do. In this particular context, Jesus is not stressing that he and God are one person, but instead that they each have the same call - being united in their work.

What would it mean if we were to take this example to heart? How would our lives be changed if we were seeking to unite ourselves with the work of Jesus, which is ultimately the work of God? Do we know our shepherd's voice and follow him daily into this landscape of resurrection?

This image of the good shepherd is poetically captured in Psalm 23. The imagery is rich, meaningful, and comforting while we frolic like lambs in the landscape of practicing resurrection. As we play *Marco Polo* with God, the psalmist reminds us of how we need to move through transition in our lives - any transition - whether it be death, divorce, job loss, moving, loss of health, or anything with change. Knowing that when we cry out, *Marco!* God inevitably responds, *Polo!* and in this way God guides us through those most difficult times where the only way out is to live through them - one trusting step at a time.

Draw near to God and God will draw near to you. Even when we are having a dark night of the soul, God is still closer than our breath. We must continue to be faithful even when we feel forsaken because God is still with us.

Human beings want to see signs - something measurable - but John's Gospel tells us that even the signs that Jesus does aren't enough. Eventually, we need to act as though believing is a choice - it is a free will action, rather than the goal of winning an argument. The time comes when evaluating the evidence must end. There is the immeasurable act of faith that must happen.

Thomas Keating writes, "The chief thing that separates us from God is the thought that we are separated from [God]. If we get rid of that thought, our troubles will be greatly reduced."

This is how we are called to continue God's work in the world: One small step in the darkness toward the voice - a soft shuffle in the right direction that brings us closer. As we respond to God's voice, others who are also lost hear us and are able to call out to God themselves. The things we do when we follow Jesus in our daily lives matter, and the ripple effects are clear.¹

There is nothing we cannot do when we are following Jesus. But rather than trying to figure God out, we need to just breathe God in each day as we follow Jesus, each trusting step of the way. Stop trying to pin God down. Stop demanding answers to the mysteries of our faith and just live it. Stop trying to sort the sheep and just let Jesus be the Good Shepherd.

Amen.

¹ Much of this section is the work of Rev. Danae Ashley of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Seattle. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/pointing-to-god-easter-4-c-may-8-2022/>