



Sunday, May 11, 2025  
John 10:22-30 (Fourth Sunday of Easter)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompanado

### ***Christ is Risen!***

A few weeks ago I went to the DMV to renew my soon-to-be expiring driver's license and get one of the new Real ID's for use when I travel. And even though I have a passport and a passport card that I *could* use, I figured it was just easier to get a Real ID and avoid having to carry my passports around unnecessarily. So, I went online and surprisingly I was able to get an appointment the next day and also fill out the necessary forms and print them to take with me to *hopefully* minimize my time at the DMV. Dare I say that *so far* the process was easy and efficient. The next morning I arrived about 10 minutes early and I was shocked that they were ready to take me *before* my appointment time. In fact, I had completed the paperwork verification process *and* had my new picture taken all *before* my actual appointment time. To borrow from Pastor Chris' Easter message...this was shaping up to be the ***BEST DAY EVER!*** But before the process could be finished they had me take a seat in the waiting area, however, as soon as I sat down they called me up to an available window – even before the two people who had completed their check-in before me. *Could this day really get any better?* So, I went up to the window, turned in my forms and my expiring driver's license, along with my passport card, which the website said was an acceptable form of ID. After that I had to complete a quick vision test. Things were moving along smoothly when the woman helping me said that all that was left was to scan my passport card before I could pay the fee and be on my way. So, she went back to a rather large and specialty looking machine and after a few moments she turned around and asked if there was any chance I had my actual passport book with me because sometimes their machine has trouble with passport cards. I said, *“unfortunately I don't because the website said passport cards were acceptable.”* She said, *“well let's see if we can figure this out”* and continued trying before calling a colleague over to see if *she* could get it to work. That woman tried a few times then turned around to ask if I had my passport book because “sometimes their machine has trouble with passport cards.” I again replied, *“unfortunately I don't because the website said passport cards were acceptable.”* The two women continued trying to get it to work before inviting a third person over to try *his* luck at getting the machine to scan my passport card. He too was unsuccessful and then paused to ask me if I happened to have my passport book because “sometimes their machine has issues with passport cards.” To which I replied once again, *“unfortunately I don't because the website said passport cards were acceptable.”* After several more failed attempts they finally called a woman over who appeared to be a supervisor, and she tried several times unsuccessfully. Eventually *she* turned around and asked if I had my passport book because...you guessed it, ***sometimes their machine has issues with passport cards.*** To which I replied, *“unfortunately I don't because... “the website said passport cards were acceptable.”*

At this point I was starting to think that all my previous luck had run out and now this quick and efficient experience was going to turn into a far less pleasurable one. Then the first clerk who was helping me returned with my passport card along with the other three co-workers behind her, and she said, *“I'm just going to try it one more time in my card reader,”* and to everyone's surprise, ***it worked!*** So, I paid the fee, got my temporary license photocopy and was finally on my way. What started out as such a promising experience at the DMV turned into quite a suspenseful ordeal, which in the end, worked out but not without a little extra suspense before it was done. And ***suspense*** is exactly what's at the heart of today's gospel story.

*“How long will you keep us in suspense?”* the religious leaders ask Jesus in today's gospel. I suspect we've all had times of suspense in our lives, and we've asked that question, whether it was of Jesus or someone else. Sometimes we experience suspense as a time of excited waiting and expectation. It's the suspense of receiving and opening a gift, the suspense of going on a trip, the suspense of a newborn's birth. But that's not the kind of suspense we hear about in today's gospel, and it's not the kind of suspense I'm talking about. I'm talking about the other kind of suspense – my DMV kind of suspense. The suspense of waiting for something to happen and the uncertainty about what's next – times when we're doubtful or undecided, circumstances that leave us anxious or apprehensive about what will or will not happen. They are times of uncertainty and not knowing. And at least for the moment our life is suspended – it's on hold.



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When have *you* experienced that kind of suspense? And what parts of your life are in suspense today? Is it about your marriage, your children, or maybe another relationship? Maybe the suspense is about a decision or a conversation you're facing. Maybe it's about making a difficult or painful change. Perhaps it's about your faith or your job. Or maybe it's about money, health, grief, loss, or your future. *What is causing your life to be in suspense today?* Regardless of how it comes about I think suspense is more about what's going on *within us* than what's going on *around us*. And yet, most of us deal with the circumstances rather than ourselves. We seek an exterior solution for an inner discomfort, and that rarely works. We grasp for facts and reason. We want information, answers, and straight talk. *That's* what the religious leaders want in today's gospel. *"If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly,"* they say to Jesus. And this isn't the first *or* the last time he will hear *"if you are."* It's throughout the gospels. It begins with his temptations in the wilderness and ends with his crucifixion: *"If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."* *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple."* *"If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us."* *"If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."* *"If you are the Messiah, tell us."* *"If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself,"* *"If you are"* is in all four gospels. It's in my own life too, and perhaps it's in yours. I've thought and said those words, and I'm guessing you have too. Sometimes I still do. *"If you are."* *If you are wise and all knowing... If you are powerful... If you are merciful... If you are loving... If you are good... If you are compassionate... If you are generous... If you are forgiving... If you are concerned... If you are listening... If, if, if.*

Every *"if you are"* statement I make says more about me than it does about Jesus. It points to what's going on within me. It's about my own suspense and wanting to be rescued from the discomfort. It's about who I want and need Jesus to be. It's about my projections onto and expectations of him. I want Jesus to prove himself to me in ways that fit my image and understanding of who *I think he should be*. When I'm in suspense I'd rather Jesus belong to me than me belong to Jesus. And *that's* the issue for Jesus in today's gospel. *"You do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep,"* Jesus says. That's not the way we often think about believing and belonging. We tend to prioritize believing. We think the right beliefs lead to belonging. That's not, however, what Jesus says. Believing is not the *prerequisite* to belonging, it's the *consequence* of belonging. And that makes all our *"if you are"* statements problematic. Jesus rarely offers us information about himself. Instead he invites us into an experience of himself. He shows himself to us rather than simply telling us about himself. ***Christ is risen!***

What if Jesus had said to the religious authorities in today's gospel, *"Let me clarify this once and for all. I am the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one?"* What if he responded to each of our *"if you are"* statements exactly the way we want? We might get the information – the answer we're looking for, but then what? And would we be satisfied with that? Would it transform or change our lives or make any difference? I'm not sure it would. Maybe what's in our head doesn't matter as much as where our heart is. That's what I hear when Jesus says, *"The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me."* He's shown us who he is in changing water into wine; cleansing the temple; feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fish; enabling a lame man to stand up, take his mat, and walk; forgiving the woman caught in adultery; giving sight to the man blind from birth; raising Lazarus from the dead. And at Easter he shows us that life conquers death. What would it mean for you and me to belong to the works of Jesus? What *are* those works offering you and me in our suspense today? And what are they asking of us? I wonder what it would be like to let go of our *"if you are"* statements to Jesus and instead start saying to ourselves, *"If I am..."* *If I am hearing his voice... If I am following him... If I am known by him... If I am given eternal life... If I am forgiven... If I am good enough... If I am "unsnatchable" from his hand...*

If you and I *are* all these things *and so much more*, then how will we choose to live our lives differently today? ***Christ is Risen!*** Thanks be to God! Amen!