



Friends, may grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus our Lord. **AMEN**

In this section of Luke, Jesus tells us three parables, two of which we have as our Gospel reading for today. The third is the parable of the prodigal son and his elder brother. They all make the same point about joy over the repentant sinner.

We begin by hearing that Jesus is in the midst of another group of people. Remember two weeks ago we had Jesus at a banquet and last week the multitudes were following Jesus. Today tax-collectors and sinners were coming to listen to Jesus and that left the Pharisees and scribes grumbling. These sinners are drawn to Jesus as they somehow feel or sense that Jesus can make things right for them. And the Pharisees are left angered because Jesus is teaching things contrary to what they want to believe. And so, they grumble that Jesus would eat with such sinners. You might even say that these two parables begin out of love versus law. A perfect example of Law versus Gospel if you will. What I mean by that is these religious men, pillars of their community are preoccupied with ritual observances so much so that they are blind to their own sin. Their concern for the law has caused them to forget God's love for sinners. Just as we are called to love the sinner, but hate the sin, so too we are called to repentance, repentance where God's forgiveness can bring overwhelming joy. And it is a joy that no law can attain.

And so, we have the parable of the lost sheep. I have never been a shepherd, and honestly it is never an actual career, I have aspired too. However,

knowing a very little about sheep, we can see the possibility that a sheep would get lost. They are not very smart animals and need someone to look out for them. They easily graze and find themselves lost. There is also implied safety in numbers in this story.

Our analogy tells us that the kingdom of God is like a good shepherd who has a flock of a hundred sheep who, losing just one of them, will leave the others and go after the one that is lost until he finds it and brings it back to the fold. A few things here that it is wise for us to think about this morning. What does this parable say about God, about us and about our relationship to each other?

First, Jesus asks who among the listeners will go to find one lost sheep. Our world tells us that no one would. Losing one sheep out of a hundred is an acceptable loss. Only 1% loss so no big deal. Too much of our world today is programmed to accept failure. School administrators today accept a sizable dropout rate. I heard that the divorce rate in the US is as high as 50%. The unemployment rate is good when it is below 10%. And infant mortality is also a fact of life. Accepting not every student will graduate, all marriages to stay together, everyone to hold a job and all infants to live is what we might say unrealistic in our society today. So, what is the big deal to lose just one sheep.

Well, it is a big deal to God. Every sheep counts. That is the first lesson of this parable. With God nothing is lost, not even one sheep. A saying I hear all too often is, "You can't win them all." And yes, the Brewers are playing very poorly recently! But God can and does win them all.

The second lesson to take away here this morning is that yes, we are all God's precious children, and we are made to live in community. God does not want us to be separated from each other. We belong to a flock here at CTS and of Christians around the world. And when one of us is missing, we are changed and not for the better. We as a group are lost when one of us goes missing.

I know that several of us tease when we see someone back in church on Sunday morning that has been absent for a while. We point to the guest book on the front table as ask them kiddingly to sign in. We do this because we love and care for one another and it is a way to show someone that their presence was missed. You find as you age that the more intimately, we are connected to another person, the more we agonize when we are separated and vice versa.

We are joined together in the Kingdom of God as a family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, joined by our common allegiance to Him. So, it is true

that when one of us is missing, we feel the loss. The Kingdom of God is not complete until everyone is safe and secure and accounted for. This is why it is important not to give up on people who drop away from church. Part of us is lost if we don't try to get them back in community with us. The Good Shepherd will also go looking for them as well. He searches until He finds them and gets them back in the fold. We must be persistent in reaching out to those who no longer join us on Sunday morning for worship. No scolding but Jesus tells us that there is joy in finding the lost.

Our government makes a big deal out of seeking to get all the MIA's home from conflicts around the globe, even decades after they went missing. And it is true that our MIA's in the church should be sought after with such gusto. It does not matter what caused the lost to get lost, but it does matter that we go to any length to reach them and reconnect and bring them home. That is the nature of the Good Shepherd, and it ought to be the nature of any church that bears His name. For joy comes in the finding and making us whole in the Kingdom of God. **AMEN**