

The Third Sunday after Trinity: June 28, 2020
“Rejoice with the Lost”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is the Gospel reading from Luke 15, “*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ So he told them this parable.*”¹ What follows is three of the most well-known parables in Christendom. The Shepherd seeks the lost sheep, the woman seeks the lost coin, and the Father shows His mercy by seeking out both of His sons. The lost are being found and there is much rejoicing.

When thinking through the parables, we must keep in mind what is trying to be conveyed. It does little good to try and parse out every detail, or force everything we know about Jesus, or the Trinity, into every parable; that is not their intention. The purpose is to teach something about the Kingdom of God. When you take all the parables together, only then can you get a more fleshed-out picture of the work of Jesus and the reality of the Kingdom of God.

In the two parables before us today, whom do we find? The shepherd, who is Jesus, seeking His sheep; that one is pretty clear. What about the woman? The woman is the Church, the bride of Christ, the one whom is given the task of caring for the treasures of God. She holds the lamp, the light of Christ, and shines it into every dark corner to seek those that are lost.

Notice the One whom does the seeking—the shepherd, the light, the Father – all three of these are Jesus. Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross and carried the full weight of the sheep; He bore the frightful wrath of God’s wrath for the sheep and died to bring the sheep home. Jesus shines a lamp through the whole house, driving away the darkness, lighting the path, causing darkness to flee. Jesus reaches out to both the tax collectors and sinners, as well as the Pharisees and the scribes.

When you hear Pharisee in any text, you should immediately put yourself in their place. The Pharisees were good church goers. They read the Sacred Texts. They wanted others to do the same. They were leery about new teachings and suspicious

¹ Luke 15:1-3

of new teachers. At the time of Christ, they were trying to teach others to live according to the Word of God, while at the same time not trying to be squashed by the governmental authorities or thrashed by the pagans living around them.

So, what would the Pharisees think as they listened to these parables? Was Jesus saying they should be seeking the lost? After all, the Pharisees were supposed to be the shepherds of the people, leading people to God. This is an attractive viewpoint, isn't it? If we're the good people who are trying to lead those other, poor, miserable lost sinners to Christ, then that casts us as spiritually superior. We may not say that out loud, but there is a part of us that wants to think that we're just a little more loving or a little wiser or a little closer to God than those other guys, right? I'm not lost. Those people are lost.

Logically, it really makes no sense for Jesus to use the parables of the lost coin and lost sheep to encourage the Pharisees to try to find the lost. The Pharisees were already trying to win people over; but they were trying to win them over by their own goodness. Instead of carrying them, they were teaching that sheep had to carry themselves. Instead of using the light to search for the coin, they were to use their own light, their own smartness, their own works and ingenuity, their own righteousness to work themselves out of the dark corner and back into the purse of the church.

This is where I get upset with modern Christianity. You people have a problem. You think that you are so smart and wonderful that you can actually win people for Jesus; or worse, you think that it relies on you and so you don't do anything. You keep the light given to you all tucked away and hidden inside. The reality is God is better than you. Your righteousness will not win anyone over. You aren't that righteous. On your own, all you can hope to give are shortcuts around God's Word to make others temporarily, maybe, perhaps, kind-of feel better, like putting Band-Aids on bullet holes.

Every sinner needs a righteousness that is perfect, a holiness that is not their own. Read carefully. The woman in the parable seeks the lost coin, but not with her own skill. She first lights a lamp to light the darkness of the house. In the darkness of human works, no lost coin will ever be found, nor any lost sinner.

Read the Gospels again. You will not find Jesus telling the Pharisees that their problem is not seeking the lost. Jesus said, “***The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.***”²

If this was not the Pharisees problem, what was Jesus trying to teach them? Perhaps the Pharisees should identify with the ninety-nine good sheep. Again, there is a kind of attraction to that point of view, since it made them seem spiritually superior. They're not lost. They've been good, little sheep who stay right where they ought to be. They obey the Law, they do good deeds, they pray often, tithe 10%, you know, “***God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.***”³

Here again, they miss the point of Jesus' parable. Why would Jesus bother to tell them a parable just so He could say to them, "You guys are good sheep. You're doing great! Keep up the good work!"

No, the overall message of Christ to Israel is summed up in the Gospels in Jesus' first sermon, “***Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.***”⁴ What Jesus wanted the Pharisees to do was repent. The Pharisees kept resisting the repentance Christ preached, as they also refused to be baptized by John. They thought that they were not wicked, lost sinners, so they needed neither Baptism nor repentance. The Pharisees were not the good sheep that they thought they were. They were the lost sheep who needed repentance.

Christ is speaking the same parable to you. So you must also ask who you are in the parable. Are you a good shepherd who seeks lost sheep? Are you a good sheep who does not need to be found? Or are you a lost sheep?

Perhaps you are tempted to think that the parable is not for you at all. Perhaps you are tempted to think that the parable is to be used to tell others what to do, but not you, because you're doing just fine.

Anyone who thinks this way is NOT doing fine. Quite the opposite: They have become Pharisees in their hearts, “***This is the message we have heard from him***

² Luke 19:10

³ Luke 18:11-12

⁴ Matthew 4:17

and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”⁵

The problem is, it is easy for you to think that once you've been found by Christ, now you're no longer lost. But spiritual lost-ness does not simply mean that you have gotten confused and you've strayed from the path a bit and you need directions. Being lost means being spiritually blind and full of sin. This comes from the sinful flesh, which you still have in you. You are forgiven and declared righteous in God's eyes, and the sinful flesh still remains this side of heaven.

So you should not see yourselves as the Shepherd. That is Christ. Nor should you see yourselves as the good sheep. In fact, they are not really good sheep. They are only sheep that think that they are good. They think that they need no repentance, nor need any shepherd. If you think that way, then you will not faithfully attend the Divine Service or Bible Study, because you are doing just fine without them, or so you would think.

You must see yourselves as the lost sheep. Only the lost sheep get the attention of the Shepherd. Only they get carried. People want to think that they only get carried during the bad times. A sheep wants to think that he walks alongside the Shepherd, and when it gets too tough, the shepherd lifts him up on His shoulders. But no, if you are Christ's sheep, then He always carries you.

We should theologially fix the poem footprints. Once there was a certain sheep who dreamt that he could see footprints in the sand. As his life passed by in the dream, there was always only one set of footprints. The sheep expected to see two sets of footprints during the good times, but only one during the hard times, because then the Shepherd would carry him. But no, there was always only one set of footprints, good times or bad. Then the sheep complained to the good Shepherd, "Where were you all that time? Why was I the only one leaving footprints?" The

⁵ 1 John 1:5-9

Good Shepherd replied, "Silly sheep! Those are My footprints. I have been carrying you the whole way."

As we prayed in the Collect of the Day, without God nothing is strong and nothing is holy. It is with Peter we know, "***Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.***"⁶

While we constantly stray, running to our own ways and hiding in dark corners, He stayed straight—all the way to the cross. The devil prowled. Jesus was spat upon, mocked, stricken, smitten and afflicted. They shoved a crown of thorns on His head, whipped Him and He stayed on the right path finding at the end nails pounded into His flesh.

While the darkness of sin was thrust upon Him and the weight of God's judgement against sin was poured out, Jesus continued to shine as the light, whom no darkness could overcome.

This is the reason Paul declared, "***We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.***"⁷ "***For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.***"⁸

The Cross is how He carries His sheep. The Cross lifts you up out of the mire and muck of your own sins, out of the thorn bushes of trespasses into which you have strayed, and out of the jaws of wolves and the prowling lion. His Blood was shed for you so that you are always His sheep, always found, forever and ever.

⁶ 1 Peter 5:6-10

⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:23

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:18

You have been sought out and carried home. Here, you are clothed and a feast is spread for you; a feast you eat with angels and arch-angels and the whole company of heaven, who rejoice over you, a sinner who is forgiven.

By God's grace, this is the gift that keeps on giving. Repentance is a whole life for a lifetime kind of think. The light shines on your dark corners and your sins are exposed. The Law is proclaimed so that you sorrow over your trespasses. Then rejoicing happens, as He shows you His blood and water flowing from His side over your head and into your mouth.

Over your repentance, you one sinner, the angels rejoice. You are carried from the font to the altar and then one day as you rejoice in heaven, your body will be carried one last time from the font to the altar to rest until that day when it is raised in the Resurrection and body and soul forever enjoys the Kingdom of God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, "***This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.***"
Thanks be to God!

"The words which absolution give
Are His who died that we might live;
The minister whom Christ has sent
Is but His humble instrument.

When ministers lay on their hands,
Absolved by Christ the sinner stands;
He who by grace the Word believes
The purchase of His blood receives."⁹ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁹ "As Surely as I Live," God Said LSB 614:5-6

Prayer of the Church**Third Sunday after Trinity: June 28, 2020**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Lord of heaven and earth, consider our afflictions and troubles, and forgive all our sins. To You, we lift up our souls. In You, we trust; let us never be put to shame. Seek us when we stray, work in us repentance, and by the voice of Your Son, our Good Shepherd, bring us back into the fold. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bless the pastors and teachers of Your Church. Preserve them from all error, false belief or other great shame and vice. Fortify them for their vital work through extraordinary difficulties and as they gather together Your congregation again around Your Word. Bless their preaching and teaching, that it would lead their hearers to confess, with St. Paul, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, We thank You for the many blessings which You have showered upon Pastor Klinge, his wife Debbie, and the saints of St. John's, State Center, especially for the Gospel and the Holy Sacraments and for Your continued presence with Your people. We rejoice in Your goodness and in the promise that You will never leave us or forsake us. Grant that no one may be left without the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments. Bless Your Church throughout the world so that she may give faithful witness to the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ both in word and deed. Preserve and protect Your people at all times, and bring them at last to the heavenly home which You have prepared for all who serve You in faith and love. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Defend Your Holy Church throughout the world. Keep her safe from all harm and danger. Defend those who suffer for Your name's sake, and give them boldness to confess the faith no matter the consequences. Even as we love life and strive to preserve it, do not let us love this life above the eternal life won for us in Christ Jesus. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bless our country as we prepare to celebrate Independence Day, that we would cherish the freedoms we have and always stand ready to defend them. Give wisdom to all those who have been placed in authority over us, that as they strive to preserve life and livelihood in our land, they would do it with an eye toward sustaining the freedoms enjoyed in our nation, especially our religious liberty. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Support and defend all who face trials and tribulations of any kind; those in any want or need; those who are burdened with animosity in the home and community; those who are suffering from illness, loneliness, depression, anxiety, unemployment or any other affliction [*especially Carmen, Susan, Marvin, Ken, Zoey and those we name in our hearts*]. Give strength and endurance in the midst of all difficulty and, if it be Your will, grant restoration and relief. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted **Hutch & Julie and Randy & Diane** during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, You call all Your penitent children to the feast of Holy Communion. Grant that we who receive this most holy feast of Christ's very body and blood today would be strengthened in our faith and encouraged to love one another as Christ has loved us. Look with mercy on the saints who are kept from Your Supper due to illness or safety measures, and bring them soon to Your table. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Father, receive our praise this day for all who have fallen asleep in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life in Christ. Keep us in that same faith and hope, that we would rise with them on the Last Day and enter the inheritance prepared for us before the foundation of the world was laid. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**