

Sermon Proper 19 2019

September 15, 2019

Luke 15:1-10

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

A couple of weeks ago, I was listening to yet another podcast, and something struck me again. This one was with a couple of professors from Concordia in Irvine California. So these men are both devout Lutherans, but they were talking about the topic of nihilism. Now, if you're not familiar with that term, or you've heard it but aren't sure what it means, nihilism is best described by saying that it's the belief that there's nothing but this. Sure there's our lives now, but once that's over, that's it. For us as Christians, such a point of view is really a depressing thought.

However, what caught my attention wasn't just this presentation about a belief that there's nothing more to life than just the drear of the day to day, it was their discussion about this belief. In particular that one of them made the point that he's not bothered as much by those who have really wrestled with this and come to this conclusion, no instead he's bothered by those who haven't wrestled with it, who perhaps don't even profess to believe in this, but act as though this is the case. He even gave a sort of humorous example. He mentioned a student that he had seen—a student that if I understood correctly even professed to be Christian—but a student that demonstrated this sort of mindset. The professor said that he witnessed the student in the cafeteria and was disappointed by the way he treated the people there. Apparently the student walked up to the serving line, never acknowledged the people serving him, just looked at the food, pointed, and grunted, "Eggs." The professor said he was so struck by the lack of love and awareness of this interaction, that he felt as though it indicated that while the student professed to believe in something, ultimately—at least here, and maybe the kid was just having a bad day for an 18-22 year old—but ultimately this demonstrated a functional nihilism. It was as though all of this was utterly meaningless.

Now I make that point because as we look around, the reality is that there aren't many professed nihilists out there. There aren't a lot of people who will say that they really don't think that there is anything else to this life besides what's happening right now. But there are sure a lot of functional nihilists. There are a whole lot of people that speak of being "spiritual" or who profess to believe in God, even who profess to being

Christian, but as they go about their day to day activities, they act as though this is it, that their faith really has no bearing on anything in their life. As though all there is are our iPhones and Netflix, and our Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat accounts.

As we look at this, then we see a “lost-ness,” don’t we? And we see this all around us. This is rampant. So many people are so lost in the midst of this. It’s the opiate of the masses in our day. We are so distracted with all of the things that entertain and engage us that we forget that there’s more to it.

Of course, as we reflect on this as Christians, when we really examine it, we know why. We know that as we have fallen out of fellowship with our God through our sin, it leaves us wrecked and broken. It leaves us destitute in a wilderness of that sin and our inability to stand up on our own and walk to safety.

And this is just what we hear Jesus talking about in the lesson, **“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?... Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?”**

Yes the world is lost. It’s a mess, and we’ve done this to ourselves in our sin. And we in the Church aren’t excluded from the mess of it. In fact, we can see how we are just as broken. As Jesus was standing there teaching and caring for the lost, Luke tells us that they were grumbling: **“And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’”** Now, I often think about how I’m glad that generally in the church today we don’t grumble when sinners come to repentance. Thankfully, when someone becomes Christian, even if they’re the worst of the worst, you don’t hear a lot of Christians griping about it. But that doesn’t mean we don’t still grumble. We grumble about the world. We grumble about life. We grumble about a lot.

As we do that, as we live in the midst of this world, this “lost-ness” that we ourselves are under, we need to think like Paul. What does Paul say about himself in the epistle lesson? How does he think about himself? **The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.** We need remember that I am foremost of sinners. Each of us should think that. I am as sinful and as deserving of death and God’s punishment as the worst Hitler, or the worst Stalin. Sure they may have committed some atrocities, but my sin is equally as condemnable as theirs.

As I think you all know, I started teaching a class at Concordia this fall. It was interesting that we had that very discussion this week. Is one sin worse than another? And of course we see that some sins have a more devastating effect on people. My hate for my brother in my heart certainly has less effect on his life than it would if I actually harm him. But whether I harm him or not, that hate is still sufficient to condemn me to Hell, and I would deserve it. It can be so easy to forget that. But don't. Because when you are reminded of it, then you remember that need that you have to repent. You remember the need that you have to confess your sinfulness, to have contrition for that sin, and that need that have for atonement for that sin.

It's there then that the great joy of our Lord is found. **And when he has found [the sheep], he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.**

But even as I say that we have to understand that this repentance isn't something that we will ourselves to do. We can't just stand here lost, saying, "OK, I need to repent, I need to repent, I need to repent." Instead, this repentance is something God gives to us. And as I say that, we have to also understand that if there's a sin we're committing, we can't justify continuing in that sin by saying, "Well God just hasn't given me repentance yet." No, if you're not repentant, then you need to meditate on just what your sin really is. You need to consider just how corrupt you are. You need to realize that if you cling to that sin, then that is as though the Great Shepherd has come to you, and He has found you, and He's about to throw you on His shoulders, and yet, you say to Him, "That's OK, I don't need it. I'll find my way back on my own." And there consider that this sin, any sin, all sin deserves that great wrath of our God to its fullest degree. All your sin deserves the full suffering of Hell, like I said.

And then you can see this work of God to rescue you. You can see the depth of the love of this Shepherd for you. How He sent this David from the Old Testament lesson, as He said, **"And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd."** And it's in this David, in Jesus that we see that He hasn't left us to suffer in this "lost-ness." He hasn't left us so that we would just have to accept that we'd be cast into Hell, cast aside in the wilderness. No, instead He pursues us and finds us in this Shepherd. The Shepherd

came and died for the sheep, laid down His life for them. Shed His blood that He would suffer not only with them, but for them. That Shepherd proves this love and takes your place under the wrath you deserve. Then He rises again to show that you're forgiven.

Then He even sends His under-shepherds. He sends His pastors—as I've said before, pastor means shepherd—He sends His under-shepherds pursuing you with His Word, putting you on His shoulders in baptism. Feeding and sustaining you in the midst of all your trials through His Holy Supper. Consider that love, that care, then Christians.

As you do so, I want you to take three things from this. First of all be a sinner. I don't mean that I'm encouraging you to sin. I don't need to do that, you're already going to. No, what I mean is be a sinner as Paul was. **The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.** It's that you confess your sinfulness because Christ came into the world not for the healthy, but the sick, not for the righteous, but for the unrighteous. So that's first.

Second, I was reading a sermon from Luther on this and he made the point that just as Christ covers us sinners, finds us sinners and gives to us His righteousness as this Shepherd. We should do the same for our neighbor. When our neighbor sins, even sins against us, we should cover their unrighteousness with the righteousness that's ours in Christ. We should love them in the midst of that, forgive them as we have been forgiven. Cover their impiety with our piety. Not rubbing it in their face, but caring for them in the midst of it. So, first be a sinner. Second care for your neighbor as Christ cares for you.

Finally, to tie back to the beginning, don't be a functional nihilist. It's easy to step out of Church on Sunday morning and have that be the extent to which you practice your faith. This is a very real salvation you are given here. This is a very real love that your God has for you. This is a very real faith which has very real implications. Know that as you go out into the world. Know that and live as the Psalmist said, **"I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight. Let my soul live and praise you, and let your just decrees help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments."** You are a sheep gone astray, so don't forget His commandments. But know that He has found you and carried you upon His shoulders. This is true and means more than the wholeness of this world altogether. Amen.