

Rev. Kurt Cockran, Risen Savior Lutheran Church (Basehor, KS), 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 19), September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Jesus: the Manic Partier for Repentant Sinners

Luke 15:1-10; Ezekiel 34:11-24

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

Through Ezekiel, God in Christ said to Israel of old: enough is enough. You leaders of Israel have failed to shepherd and care for my people. This is why you've been carried away to Babylon. Instead of feeding them, you sought to fill your own belly, so now I, the Lord, will feed my own sheep myself. I will descend from the heavens and come down to my people.

As it was said by Ezekiel, "I [myself] will rescue My flock. . . . 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 I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken."

Now it's important to get our timeline right. When Ezekiel preached these words on God's behalf, David had been in the grave for 500 years. How in the world could David himself be set as shepherd over Israel while his body lay waste in the grave? So it was that Ezekiel wasn't referring to the historical man David, but He who would fill the office of David, the Son of David, the eternal king who would rule over an eternal kingdom, the eternal shepherd who would forever feed His sheep: the Son of David who's also the Son of God incarnate: Jesus. This Good Shepherd will rescue His people by laying down His life for the sheep. He will come not to be served, but to serve.

And when this Good Shepherd came, we hear how many sheep followed him, the historian Luke inspired by the Holy Spirit reported, "the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him." You could say that the sheep were finally hearing their Good Shepherd call out their name to lead them out of the danger of their sin and instead to still waters

of forgiveness. We hear from Matthew that whenever Jesus encountered these sheep who had gone astray but now returning, Jesus would look at them with compassion, knowing that they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He welcomed them not with a motivational speech of how they can turn their lives back around to not be a tax collector and sinner, or with vain approval of their sin, but welcomed them by taking away their sin, by setting them free from their slavery to sin and giving them new life, through the atonement on the cross.

So as it was in Ezekiel's day that Israel's leadership failed to shepherd the sheep, to teach them in the way to go, to feed them with the gifts of God, so in our Gospel we see the same story again: "the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" Jesus responded to these wolves in sheep clothing by presenting three parables: (1) the lost sheep, (2) the lost coin, (3) and the lost son (otherwise known as the parable of the prodigal son). Today we focus on the first two. Jesus didn't just give these parables to put the Pharisees back in their place, to get them off their high horse, to take them down from their pedestal, merely to humiliate them or make examples of them. No, he gives these parables because He wants them to see how the Pharisees themselves are lost and astray and in need of finding, that they would then hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and be one for whom the angels rejoice to see converted for God.

"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?" Now I admit, my knowledge of shepherding practices is lacking. But whereas Jesus implies a "yes" to the rhetorical question, "well of course you would go and seek it!" I've read that typical thinking of the day would probably go the other way: "uh, I would be sad at the one I lost, but I can't risk letting the other 99 alone (as the text says) in the open country."

The same type of thing occurs in the next short parable, “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?” Again, Jesus implies a “yes... all of you would seek the lost coin diligently, obviously.” True, that may be obvious. But then he says, “And when [the woman] has found [the coin], [which of you would not be like this woman] when she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’” Um, no. Not obvious. I wouldn’t go after the one lost sheep at risk of leaving the 99 alone, and I might spend a bit of time looking for a lost coin, but certainly not the whole day, and I certainly wouldn’t then spend that coin throwing a party for my neighbors – they didn’t help me find that coin, after all, and it’s a rather silly thing to celebrate so overtly. We have a word for those folks in our day who get a little too-excited over simple things like that: manic. Or even obnoxious.

“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. . . . [T]here is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Jesus shows the Pharisees and us with Pharisee tendencies that the Lord God, and the angels with Him, are the manic partiers who have over-the-top joy over even just one sinner who repents, even over the repentance of these tax collectors and sinners, even over you who repent. Meanwhile, He laments the self-righteous pride of the Pharisees who believe they have no need of forgiveness.

The worldly thinking would say “no, that’s silly. It’s the upright who get things done, not the sinners who need 7 times 70 forgiveness.” But Jesus says, “no, that’s how I work.” “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to

shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.”

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, never stops seeking and reaching out to the lost. He never gives up. He loves His sheep – all of them – more than can be imagined, and never rests until His wayward sheep have found rest in Him and the consolation of His love. No matter who the lost are, no matter where they have wandered, no matter how long they’ve been gone, when a lost one returns to the Bridegroom Jesus and His Bride, the Church, the Lord throws a party with His angels.

The Good Shepherd calls not just to “those people” out there, but He calls out to you as well. He’s come for you, has searched you out, calls you here to join the rest of the tax collectors and sinners also gathered here. It’s often said in the world that the church is nothing but a bunch of hypocrites, to which we lovingly respond: there’s always room for more. That is, we confess our hypocrisies, are forgiven of our hypocrisies, and seek to remove our hypocrisies. Come join us, O hypocrite, and be forgiven with us. Each week your Good Shepherd draws you near to Him to remind you of when you were washed in His life-giving water. He draws you near to feed you with His Word and His body and blood. He draws you near to bind you up and heal you, to guide you to the still waters of wisdom and peace.

This is what God is about. He’s not doing a new strange thing somewhere out there that has to be figured out. He’s doing the same old thing, the same old amazing thing: feeding you, His sheep. There’s nothing He’d rather do in no other place He’d rather be than right here tending to your soul, giving you His love that has no end; proclaiming that word that can never be spoken enough: I forgive you all your sins.

Hear His voice, and He will never lead you astray. There are many wolves in sheep clothing. They will lead you to polluted waters, desolate pastures, and the dens of wolves ready to devour. Hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, spoken through His legitimately called undershepherds, and He Himself will lead you to the grass that could never be greener. The way to that eternal pasture may go through dark valleys, but your Shepherd leads you through them, through the way of the cross, through the death that leads to life, through the sacrifice of the Lamb who was slain and now reigns eternally.

Come, dear sinners, and eat Christ, your Lord, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, amen.