The Third Sunday After Trinity, Sunday, June 28th, 2020

** In The Name of The Father and of The Son**

**and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. **

It doesn't matter what country children grow up in or what language they speak, they view the world in terms of “Guys in the White Hats " and “Guys in Black ones” – “Goodies and “Baddies,” for short. As grown ups, however, demarcation lines between goodies and baddies become a bid more fuzzy, of course.

One man's goody is another fellow's baddy. Democrats, Republicans, conservatives and liberals are all quite I interchangeably goodies and baddies. And even more confusingly, one generation's goody is frequently the next generation’s baddy.

Doubtless the good folk of 12th Century Nottingham were, in reality, much fonder of their Sheriff – the lawman – than Robin Hood and his band of thugs whose self-assigned role in life was to relieve them of their hard-earned cash.

In today's Gospel reading – the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Housewife's Lost Coin – is about goodies and baddies. Jesus was preaching to both publicans and sinners – who (surprise, surprise!) who were universally regarded as baddies -- and scribes and Pharisees (no less surprising) were pretty much regarded as goodies.

Today, of course, the boot is on quite the other foot. And that’s not at all fair. The Pharisees, judged by the standards of most Christians today, should be regarded as goodies. They were pillars of the church. They strove to lead upright lives, to keep God's commandments. They praised the Lord, to love their neighbors and to give generously to the deserving poor.

The publicans and sinners, by contrast, were utterly despicable -- traitors both to their religion and their people. They openly flouted the Law of Moses and were eager collaborators with their Roman overlords. Publicans were "tax farmers" -- contract tax collectors who were paid with a percentage of the taxes they collected.

The more taxes they gathered, they more money they made. They had a reputation for extorting more out of taxpayers than they really owed. And they were hated by the ordinary Josephus even more passionately than the average Joe Six Pack hates for the IRS. It took a very special person to see any good in them at all. So how did roles of goody and bady get reversed over the years?

The parables of The Lost Sheep and The Lost Coin provide the answer, Jesus told them to illustrate the love that God has for the outcast and the despised. He tells us that God loves them just as much as he loves the righteous and that he never ceases working to bring them back into the fold.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep defines Jesus' role as Savior. In the parable, he is portrayed as the owner of the sheep. The flock is humanity, the Church, if you will. The 99 sheep that never stray are righteous folk like the Pharisees and us. The lost sheep are all those awful sinners. The shepherd’s role in seeking out lost sheep and brings them home on his shoulders is a metaphor for the way in which Jesus pleads with sinners to repent, bringing those who do so back to a state of grace.

The Parable of the Lost Coin explains our role – the Church's role – in redeeming sinners. The 10 coins represent the human souls in our keeping. The fact that the lost soul is represented by a coin, an inanimate object, implies soul has been lost by our negligence. In using this metaphor Jesus is warning us to expect the Church on earth, relying in part on fallible humans, to be less than perfect.

The parable explains how he expects us to do our job. We need to atone for our neglect and show our love for sinners by actively seeking them out. The candle represents the preaching of the Gospel. The energy the woman puts into sweeping the house means we need to turn the world upside down until the last sinner has been brought back into the fold.

The problem with scribes and Pharisees is that they were self-satisfied and smug. They strove strived to be righteous, and believed they deserved a pat on the back from everybody, including God, for their clean living. They were confident of their own salvation and looked down on fo9lks who were not like them – the publicans and sinners.

Their besetting sin was pride. While they were charitable to the poor, their bland assumption of their own righteousness led them to be thoroughly uncharitable to the genuinely lost sheep: the publicans and sinners. They didn’t attempt to minister to them.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that measured against God's standards everyone – even folks like us and the scribes and Pharisees – fall far short. All of us are in desperate need of God's grace. Thus Christians today cannot write off the scribes and Pharisees as badies because they are the mirror images of ourselves.

We, too, look down on our publicans and sinners – even though perhaps we don't always recognize them as such. Sure, we care about the poor, the homeless, the drug addict, the drunks who haunt Skid Row. We often dig deep in our pockets for them. But how often do we spare a thought for the real publicans and sinners?

How much charity do we feel in our hearts for merchants who rip us off; for bosses who exploit us; for cheating politicians, mobsters and racketeers? But Jesus points out these people are lost souls like ourselves, and, judged by God's standards, just as deserving of salvation as us.

When last did we last mount a crusade to convert Congress or the State Assembly to Christianity? When did we last try to evangelize insider traders? We help the poor. We give to the Missions. But as far as our publicans and sinners go, we'd cheerfully let them burn in Hell.

Jesus’ message in the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin to seriously, we have to understand that all of us – not just the clergy – are ministers of Christ. Each and every one of us has a duty to seek out publicans and sinners. It is the duty of each and every one of us to be a good Shepherd. Each and every one of has a duty to search for those lost sheep to bring them back to the sheep dip –my modern day metaphor for the Church. *AMEN*.

***To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Fo***