

The 15th Sunday after Pentecost
“Saving the strayed with God’s Law and Gospel”
Matthew 18:10-14
September 6, 2026
Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 15th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 18:10-14.

“10 “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. 12 “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? 13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

So far our text:

Jesus gives us the beautiful backdrop of a mountain scene where one of a man’s 100 sheep has wandered off and left the 99 and gone astray. The decision of what to do doesn’t seem to pose a problem for the man who notices that he is missing one of his sheep. Does he not leave the 99 and go to the mountains to seek the one that is presently straying? It’s a rhetorical question. Of course he does, is the answer. There is no debate here.

Jesus gives this illustration to His disciples in this moment that he needed to teach them how important it is to be humble in one’s own opinion of oneself. Don’t let yourself become arrogant and deceived into thinking that a Christian must constantly be on guard against a conceited and unrepentant heart. We see that the disciples had just asked Jesus who was the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Greatest? Jesus calls a little child into their midst for all the disciples to look upon. And then He speaks with His divine authority. **“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of**

heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Greatness...comes not by one's own works of which this child has done none, but by the work that is given to a humble trusting soul – the gift of faith – conversion by the grace of God...the faith that receives the righteousness that is not his or hers, but is imputed to him or her from Jesus, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep...whose righteousness covers all sin and makes a sinner great, and holy in the eyes of God...who now has entrance into the Kingdom of God by the greatness of the Son of Man!

Oh, every Christian needs to be on guard of self-pride and haughtiness. So, we always begin each Divine Service with a personal confession in the presence of other sheep.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” 1 John 1:8

Deceive ourselves... this is the same word that Jesus uses in the Greek in this parable “to go astray”. For to go astray is to be deceived by the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh into believing we are worthy to enter the Kingdom of God by our own righteousness. There is no truth in that. But what do we continue to hear from Scripture?

“9 If we confess our sins,” ...if we acknowledge our guilt, our lostness, our many sins which have been deceived to commit... then after the Law of God has shown us how destitute we are in the eyes of God...after the Law of God has humbled us to say “Have mercy on me a poor and miserable sinner” and only when this truth is acknowledged... then we hear the most blessed good news a person could ever hear...the Gospel!

“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

He is faithful. God is faithful. God the Son, took on our flesh to save all the lost of all unrighteousness.

What did Jesus tell the disciples and us? **“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”** And He did! Thanks be to God!

And God gives to His straying sheep something amazing. He forgives sin...right now...right here through the words of His undershepherd.

“Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

How can what is loosed on earth be loosed in heaven? Jesus gives us the very basis for how this is possible in our Gospel reading.

“whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

And this is the gift of absolution that Jesus gives to His church, His humble and repentant little ones, His believers, who are gathered together in His name. And Jesus promises He is in the midst of them, rescuing His straying sheep with the Good News of the Gospel over and over again!

The first of Luther's 95 theses reads, "When our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent ye' He meant that the whole life of the Christian should be one of repentance." The Christian's primary need is to confess his sins and receive absolution. That is a constant need. That's why we have confession and absolution in church services.

So we will sing shortly the hymn, .” *LSB 707 – “Oh That the Lord Would Guide My Ways”*.

“Assist my soul, too apt to stray, A stricter watch to keep; And should I e’er forget Thy way, Restore Thy wand’ring sheep.

Assist my soul, which is too apt to stray, a stricter watch to keep. Restore me, this wandering sheep by the Good News of the Gospel. And Jesus does! Again and again!

God’s Law continually backs us up into a corner. It traps us in our own indignation. It shows us our sin, and calls on our hearts to humble themselves before God.

The Law of God told Peter these harsh words that we heard last Sunday.

“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

Peter was being deceived by the people into thinking that Jesus’ Kingdom was of this world, that there was no need for Jesus to suffer, be killed and rise again on the third day...that our sins and Peter’s sins were not so great that Jesus had to take on our flesh to save us.

No, that’s the deception of man. That’s our sinful flesh trying to justify oneself in one’s own eyes and believing that my sins don’t deserve eternal punishment in hell. I can live forever in this world just as I am. No, this world, this vale of tears, is not our eternal home. And this sinful flesh is not my eternal tent.

My soul needs to take sin seriously. My soul needs to hear the full harshness of the Law always in today’s Gospel...

Jesus says:

“If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”

Hell fire is real. And so serious must a Christian take one’s sin that could lead him or her astray eternally, that one absolutely despises and disdains the eyes, the hands and feet that have caused offenses to God in whole hearted repentance.

And when the Law has done its work of bringing one to one’s knees, then the only escape out of the corner that we are backed up into is the Good News of the Gospel.

**“22 “Who committed no sin,Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;
23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going**

astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” 1 Peter 2: 22-25

And with Peter we exclaim anew.

“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”.

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” “Blessed” to be “poor in spirit,” to have a humble, repentant heart that believes in Jesus for one’s forgiveness. As Matthew 5 tells us, “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

On this rock solid confession of faith which confesses Christ is the Rock of our salvation, Jesus said He will build His church. Through the bestowing of forgiveness in absolution, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, Jesus lovingly seeks His straying sheep, you and me and carries them on His shoulders to safety in His righteousness and love.

“and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

Who wants to be first and greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? Jesus says, the one who is servant of all... servant of the little ones, servant of the least...humbly living in Jesus’ righteousness won by our Savior on the cross.

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

And you are blessed. Now and eternally!

Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)