

Fourteenth Sunday of Pentecost/September 15, 2019  
Luke 15:1:10/Rejoicing in Finding the Lost  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church  
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“...there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Jesus told this parable [Luke 15:1-10]: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ In the same way there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Today the Lord Jesus reminds us how precious all people are to the heavenly Father. He says there is great joy in heaven when he finds one of his lost people.

We see this often in disasters, such as hurricanes or the twin towers in New York. Think of the images of rescue workers painstakingly picking through the rubble looking for survivors and rejoicing when they find one. Day after day, rescuers risk their lives just for the chance someone might be left alive. They give so much because the lives of these people are so precious, strangers as they were.

Our Lord wants us to know He is like a shepherd looking for lost sheep. He wanders throughout this world looking for those He might save. Jesus saves people He finds in places you'd never expect. He was criticized for being friends with sinners and tax collectors, outcasts of society. No one walking down the street would pass by one and think, “Oh boy, Is this my lucky day! I saw a tax collector!”

These people were lost to God, and they knew no one wanted to find them.

But Jesus loved them. He wanted to be with them. They entertained Jesus in their homes, and He ate with them often. He found they made the best disciples because they knew how much they needed Him. They knew they would be spending an eternity in hell, as people constantly would remind them.

Today people don't generally realize on their own they are lost. Without hearing the word of God, we don't know any better. We live life within the boundaries of birth and death. We work, we play, we eat and drink, trying to find some enjoyment in all of this before life ends. We don't feel lost because we can see millions of others living the same way.

When the Gospel of Jesus comes, we are awakened to another way to see life; a different view. He teaches us to see ourselves properly by looking in the mirror of His Word where we see our image reflected; and it is not a pretty sight. He shows us the false gods we serve and how we live selfishly. He shows us how short-sighted our vision is. We don't think of living forever, only about living for today.

When we come to see how lost we really are, He shows us something else. He shows how He found us and leads us to the place we belong. He demonstrates His love by taking up the cross for us. He takes away our sin. Then, from then on, we begin to see life differently. Life doesn't have that roadblock at the end we can't pass through. We begin to consider the possibility of living forever. We look at everyday things differently now. Things that happen aren't so scary anymore.

The awakening that takes place within the Christian reminds me of the change of mind after terrorist attacks. The freedoms we used to take for granted are now different, the freedom to travel or to sit at an event and feel safe. Now we do the same things, but we think differently about them. We are more cautious and aware of our surroundings.

In a similar way when we hear the Gospel of Jesus, it causes us to think differently about life. Our values begin to change. Things that used to make us feel important and point out our status aren't so important anymore. Taking their place are the things God values, honor, holiness, goodness, compassion, love for others. It's a beautiful transition that goes on in the heart of every believer. Our hearts are changed forever.

Every soul is valuable. Evil men rejoiced because they have removed what they deemed evil people from the world 18 years ago when terrorists were sent to kill our citizens. But our Heavenly Father notices sinners, goes in after them, and even carries them back to the flock on His own shoulders. God is concerned about every one of the nearly seven and one-half billion people living on this planet. He wants all to repent and come back to him. That is why He would leave the ninety-nine sheep in safe pastures and go out after the one sheep that was lost. One percent may be an acceptable loss for us, but not for Jesus.

When someone comes into the kingdom of God, carried by Jesus in the forgiveness of sins, there is much rejoicing in heaven. The angels literally cry out in joy for God's plans is realized again. What a celebration that must be! A soul crushed under the weight of sin being hauled out of the rubble and revived, never to die again. What was lost is found. What was worthless is now become priceless. What was scorned is now praised.

As God's redeemed people we have so many reasons to rejoice. When someone we know makes a serious mistake in living their life, really messing things up by being stiff-necked and stubborn, and then realizes their sin and comes back to God, we welcome them back with open arms. Welcoming those means we are seeing things God's way and we have an accurate picture of who we really are ourselves. We rejoice God's precious person is brought back from the dead.

In New York City, they used cranes to look for people in the rubble. It didn't matter whether they were the president of a company, a tourist, or the lowest rank of security guard. Every life was precious to find. It is the same in God's flock. Here Jesus uses His own Words and the gifts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper to save us. He calls us together around His Word and to make us alive. He sends us forth into the world looking for His lost sheep. Like rescue workers, we look here and there trying to find people who want to live. When we do, we bring them to Jesus, the Great Physician of the soul for healing. We bring them here to His Word and there to holy Baptism. By the power of His sacrifice on the cross and resurrection from the dead the Holy Spirit makes them live again. He rejoices over the repentant sinner He led back to his flock.

Therefore, the preaching and sharing of God's word is so important. Together with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, this is where God is working in our world rescuing people one soul at a time. The most important part of living is being a part of God's saving work. That's why we are a church and a family of God here in time, to bring the good news of Jesus and His work to those also here in time so they may be found, restored and live in the new Heavens and the new Earth. After all, this is how He found you and rescued you, so now you will spend eternity with Jesus.