

Pentecost 14 9/15/19
Luke 15:1-10 19C

NOW THE TAX COLLECTORS AND SINNERS WERE ALL DRAWING NEAR TO HEAR HIM. AND THE PHARISEES AND THE SCRIBES GRUMBLED, SAYING, "THIS MAN RECEIVES SINNERS AND EATS WITH THEM."

Stephen Siller was his name. I cannot think of 9/11 without thinking of Stephen Siller. Stephen was a firefighter in New York City. On September 11, 2001, he had finished his shift and was on his way to play golf when he heard the news of a plane hitting the World Trade Center. Even though he wasn't on duty, he returned to the fire station and gathered his firefighting equipment. He drove his truck to the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, but the tunnel had already been closed for security purposes. Determined to do his duty, he strapped his 60 lbs. of gear on his back and sprinted the nearly two miles to what became known as "Ground Zero". There, along with 342 other firefighters, Stephen gave his life while saving others.

As we paused on 9/11 this past week, I thought of Stephen Siller; especially, when I read the words of our Gospel lesson for this Sunday. Stephen Siller reminds us of the sacrifice of Jesus to save sinners. In the words of our Old Testament reading, "I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak". This Sunday, we rejoice that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who came to seek the lost, to bring back the strayed, to bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak.

That's what Jesus does. He comes to helpless people in hopeless situations, to find them and save them from sin, death, and hell.

Sadly, most of us are like those Pharisees and scribes. We do not see ourselves as sinners. We see ourselves as one of the nine coins who remained in the woman's purse. We see ourselves as one of the compliant, obedient ninety-nine sheep who stayed with the shepherd. Jesus told this grand parable of three stories because it is **in our nature** to think that God loves us just because we are so lovable. The three stories in this grand parable teach us that God loves the unlovable. God rescues the sinner. He brings the sinner to repentance.

We have a real problem with repentance. Our problem is so great that we often skip over the word without thinking about what it means. The Augsburg confession says this is:

Repentance consists of two parts. One part is contrition, that is, terrors striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. The other part is faith, which is born of the Gospel or the Absolution and believes that for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven. [Article XII]

We don't like that first part of repentance -- the part that includes the knowledge of sin. It means that we must admit that we are by nature bad people; that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed; that we deserve only God's temporal and eternal punishment. We don't like that. We would prefer to think that we are good people. That was the problem that the Pharisees and scribes had. This is still our problem today.

But, the Law is a mirror bright to bring our inbred sin to light. Jesus told this grand 'Lost and Found' parable in order to teach the Pharisees, scribes **and us** what John wrote in his first epistle:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... If we say we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar, and his word is not in us (1:8,10).

We are sheep who love to wander. We are lost little lambs who are in a hopeless situation and helpless to do anything for ourselves. But, like the shepherd looking for that one lost lamb or the woman looking for her lost coin, our Good Shepherd Jesus comes to us. And, did you notice what the shepherd did when he found the lost sheep? The shepherd carries the burden of the sheep on his own shoulders. That's what our Good Shepherd did for us.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all," Isaiah writes (53:6). Our Good Shepherd took on human flesh and dwelt among us to carry our burden of sin to the death of the cross, so that we would have forgiveness, life, and salvation. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," Paul writes (1 Tm 1:15).

And, still today, Jesus receives sinners and eats with them, that they may live. He does it here in the worship services of His house, at His table. "What a minute, Pastor," I can hear you saying. "Are you saying there are sinners here at Concordia, Pastor? I'm shocked, shocked at the accusation there are sinners here!" Well, let me tell ya: You're looking at one; you are sitting next to one; in fact, you are one. We are all sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God. It doesn't matter what your sin is. You may be an idolater or an adulterer, a coveter. You may have taken the Lord's name in vain a 1,000-times each day. You may have spread gossip or rumors about your neighbor. You may ignore the Sabbath Day and not kept it holy by not listening to God's Word and living a holy life according to it. You may have murdered your neighbor by being angry with them and

wishing harm and ruin upon them. You may have taken something that's not yours.

But, the Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus receives sinners and eats with them. Jesus invites you to His table to eat the very body and blood that was given and shed for you. Here, He gives you forgiveness, life, and salvation. He gives you greater trust in God and love for your neighbor, even the neighbor who sometimes is not all that loveable.

And, He points us to the next meal Jesus wants to share with you. This meal looks forward to the time when Jesus comes and carries us on His shoulders, taking us to Himself in heaven, and we, with all the company of heaven, will rejoice at the marriage feast of the lamb in His kingdom which has no end.

As you live your earthly days, waiting for your exodus from this vale of tears, we live out the life that God has given us in our baptism. Did you remember what the shepherd did when he found his lost little lamb? He carried its burdens on his shoulders. Today, Jesus still carries our burdens and the burdens of your neighbor. And, He does it through you.

Baptized and living in Christ, we are Christ to our neighbor. That means that we become those who seek the lost. We love all people. We reach out to all people to love them as God loves them.

Christ does His work in you, so that He can do His work of rounding up the lost and straying sheep through you -- as you welcome and greet those who worship with you -- pray for those who are sick, mourning, or living in troubled days -- encourage the weak and fearful -- admonish and warn the lazy and the lukewarm -- teach the little lambs in Sunday School. This we do because Jesus receives sinners and carries them home.

To God be the glory. Amen.

