

Luke 15:1-10 ESV

Sunday September 11, 2022

Pentecost 14

God's Love Knows No Bounds

In Who He Seeks

In How He Seeks

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Amen.

In the name of Him who is our Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost, Dear fellow redeemed.

The Pacific theatre during World War 2 gave the Allies many seemingly insurmountable difficulties. One of these was the prison camp near Cabanatuan City. Many American and Filipino prisoners of war were held there following the harrowing Bataan Death March. As the war against Japan raged on, the prisoners feared they would be executed by their captors instead of being liberated when General McArthur took back the Island. This is where the 6th Army comes in. Leaders of the 6th Army and Filipino Guerillas came up with a plan to send a small force behind enemy lines to liberate the camp. A group of over 100 rangers and scouts and 200 guerrillas traveled 30 miles behind Japanese lines to reach the camp.

The mission seemed like a suicide mission. Scouts were unable to pass on a detailed description of the lay of the camp due to a heavy Japanese military presence in the area. Nevertheless, at the expense of their own safety, this group of rangers used the cover of darkness to infiltrate the camp. They surprised and overwhelmed the Japanese guards and freed over 500 prisoners, safely bringing them back to Allied territory. The Allies only suffered 2 casualties in this daring raid that is considered one of the bravest recovery efforts of all time. This rescue mission is the perfect example of the U.S. Military's principle, "No man left behind."

This is the same attitude Jesus talks about in our text this morning. His attitude towards sinners is also "no man left behind." Scripture is clear that God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth. In an even greater way than the brave soldiers who went on that dangerous rescue mission during World War 2, Jesus embarked on a deadlier mission to deliver all mankind from the enemy of sin and death.

Jesus uses two parables to illustrate to the Scribes and Pharisees how great God's love is to lost sinners. Our theme for this morning is: God's Love Knows No Bounds. In Whom it Seeks and in How it Seeks.

Jesus often uses exaggeration to illustrate His points. In the first parable, we see a shepherd who has 100 sheep, but one goes missing. Jesus asks the question, "wouldn't any of you leave the 99 to go find the 1?" Jesus is expecting the answer to be yes, but in reality, this is not what most people would do. No shepherd would want to risk their life to go out into the dangerous, barren, and cliff-ridden wilderness to seek one sheep that ran away.

This sheep is lost in the Judean wilderness. There are countless caves it could be hiding in, it could have fallen off a cliff, or it could have already been eaten by a predator. The likelihood of finding this sheep is next to zero, and most shepherds would not even bother to go after it. They would count it as good as gone and be content that they still have 99 sheep to bring home.

But that is not what this shepherd does. This shepherd leaves the 99 behind, in the open country, in order to find this one lost sheep. The Scribes and Pharisees had to of been thinking this shepherd was foolish and shouldn't have left the 99 sheep behind. But the shepherd does. He finds the sheep and he puts it on its shoulders so it can rest its weary legs. He brings it home and there is great rejoicing with his neighbors because he has found the sheep that was lost.

A highly improbable rescue mission turned successful. Jesus states the point He is making with this parable. 7 *"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."*

That lost sheep is like someone who wanders away from the flock of God. It is a sinner that despises the free gift of salvation that God offers him and goes off into the wilderness to follow his own path, his own desires. The longer the sheep is lost in the wilderness, the greater the chance that it will die. So also, the longer a sinner dwells in his sin, rejecting God's forgiveness, the greater the chance that he will die in his sin and be lost eternally.

Is it worth it? If you were the shepherd, would you risk your life to seek the one who despises the way of the righteous? It doesn't always seem like it is worth the effort.

But Jesus says it is. Jesus is that Shepherd who goes after the one lost sheep. He does not give up just because it is difficult, or because there might be obstacles in the way. His love for the sheep is too great to think, "It's not worth it." His love for sinners is too great to say, "They aren't worth it." He proved this when He sacrificed His own life for a whole world full of sinners. Isaiah says, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one-- to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* Jesus showed that any and every sinner is worth the effort. And He was willing to pay the ultimate price.

There once was a merino sheep named Shrek in New Zealand. In 2004, he ran away from his herd and managed to survive for 6 years, hiding away in the mountains. When they finally found Shrek, he was unrecognizable because his wool was so overgrown.

If you were like Shrek the sheep, and you wandered away from God's flock for 6 years, or even more. . . wouldn't you want someone to come seek you out? Wouldn't you want to know that the Savior's love extends even over you and washes your sins away? Of course! Especially when you hear the sweet peace and joy you will have as a member of God's flock.

This is the attitude Jesus has towards all sinners and it is the attitude He wants us to have towards our fellow-man. It does not matter who it is, Jesus wants us to seek them out with His Word to bring them back to the flock, where there is great rejoicing.

To Jesus, it does not matter if you have been a Christian your whole life and you wander away late, or if you never knew who Jesus was and lived a life totally against what God commands. His love remains the same. He is still going to be that Shepherd that searches you out to find you and bring you into His fold.

In order to illustrate His point even further, Jesus tells another parable about a woman who had 10 coins. These coins were worth about a day's wage. To lose one was not good, but it wasn't the end of the world. She still had 9 other coins and it would not be worth taking off a day of work in order to look for one little coin. But that is exactly what this woman does. This coin is so precious to her that she not only lights a lamp to help search, but she sweeps her entire house. She quite literally leaves no stone unturned. She diligently sweeps away dust and debris until she finally finds her lost coin. And what does she do next? She throws a party because she found her one coin that she lost!

It makes no sense at all. She takes a day off of work to find a coin worth about a day's wage, then she throws a party with her neighbors to celebrate the finding of this coin. Once again, Jesus tells us what His point is. *"10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

The coin is like how all people by nature: Inanimate, collecting dust, with no hope of aiding in any way to being saved. Have you ever decided to clean out underneath a cabinet or your bed and found loose change? It comes as a nice surprise, but often times the coins are covered with dust. So much dust, in fact, that it can be hard to tell whether it is a penny, dime, nickel, or a quarter. Such is the case with sin. The longer mankind sits in his natural state, the more dust he collects and the less likely it is that he is found.

Jesus is like that woman who searches diligently her whole house until she finds that lost coin. God has given all people a time of grace, and Jesus uses that time to diligently search out for sinners to bring them to repentance. He does not give up. Consider Jesus' actions towards the Scribes and Pharisees. Despite their animosity towards Him, Jesus consistently tried to call them to repentance. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus, but even then, Jesus tried to call him to repentance. Jesus said on the cross to those crucifying Him, *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:48)"*

Whether it is in the face of opposition, the face of betrayal, or even in the face of death, our dear Savior continued to search out for lost sinners. He expects the same thing from us. Jesus prayed to His Father in John 17:20-23, *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."*

Jesus has given to us, His church, the message to reach the lost. He desires all may be one with the Father and know Jesus and be saved. This is our mission on this earth: To show the world God's love extends even over them. God's love knows no bounds. Paul says, *"that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:19-20)"*

Jesus has done the hard part. He died for the sins of the whole world, reconciling the world to Himself. Now He has given us that message of reconciliation to reach both those who are lost from the flock of God, and those who are sitting in the dust of their sinful nature.

That rescue mission made by the 6th army is known as “The Great Raid.” Imagine if the leaders of the 6th Army decided those prisoners of war were not worth it. Imagine if they said that they didn’t want to risk the personal backlash they’d receive if they failed. What if the soldiers felt the Japanese presence was too great and they didn’t search diligently for a way in? What would have happened then?

What if it was decided you weren’t worth it?

Thankfully we don’t have to imagine what would have happened. We know what did happen. The 6th Army set up a plan, executed the plan, and it was successful. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, set up a plan, executed the plan, and was successful. It does matter how bad you are, or how bad anyone else is, Jesus wants to seek all sinners out in order to save them. Jesus is also the Good Shepherd in that He is diligent in how He seeks them out. He does not go through the motions, but He set the standard for reaching lost sinners by going to the cross for them. He sacrificed His life so that all may believe in Him for salvation.

And now you and I are given the same duty. God wants us to reach those who are lost. Both those from our own midst, but also those who have never heard the blessed Gospel message before.

Why should we even bother? Because this is exactly what Jesus did for you and me. God’s love knew no bounds towards you. He sought you and me out when we were still disgusting sinners, and He continues to search us out and call us back to Him even when we wander. Yes, God’s love knows no bounds: In whom it seeks and in how it seeks. May the LORD bless our efforts to reach those who are lost, to bring them to salvation which is in Christ Jesus. Amen.