

06/28/20

3rd Sunday after Holy Trinity

A Savior who seeks those who are lost

Luke 15: 1-10

1) Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. 2) And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” 3) So He spoke this parable to them, saying: 4) “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5) And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6) And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ 7) I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. 8) Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9) And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ 10) Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is a special day for thanksgiving for us here at Old Zion Lutheran. Like other congregations in the area, we have for many weeks been unable to meet together in our beautiful sanctuary. Holy Week and Easter, the Day of our Lord’s Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday—we were forced to hold “virtual-services” for these great festivals of the Church year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. And, in our absence, the angels who watch over our beloved place of worship also looked on protectively as—day after day—thousands of protestors walked by on Broad Street in demonstrations against murderous brutality and racial injustice.

We have missed sharing our Lord’s precious sacrament at this altar; we have missed the artwork and the images and the stained glass windows which proclaim His word to us; we have missed singing hymns together, joining in our liturgy together, having fellowship together. Now we are back, at least partially, and we want to give thanks for what we again have.

The threat of the coronavirus—while still very real—is mitigated enough to allow us to be here. The protestors have left our church unharmed. And therefore on this day—Sunday, the 28th of June in the year of our Lord

2020—we rejoice and give heartfelt thanks as we again gather here to listen to our Savior’s word and to receive the blessed meal of His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

For our country and our society, life cannot be—and should not be—the same now as it was before. Ways of doing things have changed for the sake of safety. Habits of eating and spending time have been altered. As a country we have, it is to be hoped, adopted some new patterns of thinking. And also for Christ’s people, things are now different. Here at Old Zion, a somber note must be added to our song of gratitude. While we have been apart, two of our members have stepped ahead of us in our walk heavenward: Ron Schaffer, choir-member, occasional soloist, and enthusiastic advocate for drawing people to our church; and also Ruth Reiser, treasured wife, mother, friend, and beloved matriarch of our congregation who for so many years has meant so much to all of us here at Old Zion.

Worshiping here, fellowshiping together, being a blessing to each other as the Lord blesses us in word and sacrament—even as we offer to our Lord heartfelt thanks for again being able to do these things, we realize that we cannot and must not ever take Old Zion Lutheran for granted. We have been reminded how fragile our lives are, how short our time may be, how precious are all the chances we have to hear His word ourselves and to invite others to join us. And we pray that the Lord will keep these lessons etched in our hearts and minds, for our Savior’s sake.

I

Once again, St. Luke’s account calls our attention in our Gospel-text to the importance of “table-fellowship” in Jesus’ day—sharing a meal with someone, a relationship which, at the time and in the culture in which our Savior carried out His earthly ministry, involved the closest ties of caring and friendship and mutual trust. That was why the Pharisees were so upset at the company with whom Jesus chose to sit.

“This man receives sinners and eats with them”—that was their complaint about Jesus as they looked on with the strongest disapproval. In their spiritual pride, they thought that they truly deserved to share a meal with the Prophet from Nazareth, but those others did not—those tax-collectors and public sinners who crowded around Him.

But you and I cannot and must not fall into that kind of Pharisaical self-deception. As Luther once said, if you really start to think that way, then hold your hand to your breast to find if you are still made of flesh and blood, and read what Scripture has to say about the enmity with our Creator into which you and I have been born. Then look at yourself in a mirror and

see how you are aging, and read also in Scripture of almighty God's verdict against our sin and against our fallenness.

No, we cannot and must not deceive ourselves about what we deserve. In thanksgiving, we rejoice to hear it said of Christ Jesus, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."

II

It was for the lost—the sinners, the tax-collectors, those whom the Pharisees despised, those like you and me—that Jesus of Nazareth was even now on His way to Jerusalem. It was for lost sinners like us that He would shed His blood on the cross of Calvary. It was for lost sheep and lost coins with no hope of rescuing themselves that He would purchase forgiveness on Good Friday and new life for us through His Easter-morning triumph.

It is because of His care for the one lost sheep that He loves so much, and for the one lost coin which is so precious to Him, that He has looked for you and me. There at the baptismal font, our Shepherd has found us with that water into which He has put His promise of pardon and life. Here at His altar, He finds us and offers His sacramental meal to us individually, so that we may—each one of us—know that He means us with His forgiveness and love.

And now in His word, He preaches to us that it is precisely for such as you and me—lost sheep and lost coins that we are—that He has gone to the cross and conquered the grave. That is the message which people like us must hear, the message which alone finds us who are otherwise without hope, the only message that gives us life.

III

In the last three months, we have been reminded in a most vivid way of our weakness and our mortality, and that is to say that we have been reminded in a most vivid way of how we need our Good Shepherd to look for us and find us, how we need for Him to persist in His search—sweep the whole house—until He has found even the likes of you and me.

We have also been reminded in a most powerful way that the future is entirely in His hands, and we do not know how long a time we have for serving Him. Our Lord finishes His little parables by telling us, "I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." To take part in His work here—to be on the lookout for other lost sheep and lost coins, to invite others to come where they can hear of Him, to share His Word as we can—that is also for us to take part in that joy of the angels.

May the Holy Spirit grant such joy to all of us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.