

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 15:1 - 10 (NIV)

¹Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴“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? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety–nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. ⁸“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Theme: Evangelism Is not Easy, but it’s Worth It

Doesn’t it seem like fall already? Last Tuesday I froze while I was watching soccer at Milwaukee Lutheran. I hope that you did find some time to relax this past summer. I planned that I was going to take time to rest and actually succeeded in that plan.

This past summer was also a special time for our congregation. We had 12 special baptisms in our congregation from two Hmong families who knew almost nothing of Christianity when they first came to us. We had some interesting discussion in those classes and a lot of questions. Now by God’s grace, they have been baptized into Christ. The most memorable part of the baptisms was when I baptized the mother, and I wasn’t sure which of the children to take first, but the youngest boy jumped right up on the step and leaned his head down to be baptized. He was so anxious.

When we share the Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ, there is fruit. Our Lord promises that His word never returns empty. He guarantees the results. But it is important to remember that evangelism is not easy. However, it is worth all the effort that is put into it.

I. Evangelism is not easy.

That was shown most graphically in how our Lord saved the world. He gave up all of His glory in heaven and took on our flesh. He didn’t live in this world with great riches and honor. He had no place to lay His head. He was laid in a manger as a baby, and we read of no permanent home that He had or possessions during His ministry. Eventually He was rejected, betrayed, denied, beaten, forsaken, and hung on a cross to die. The price of our salvation was the innocent suffering and death of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Notice the effort that is put forth in both of these parables. The shepherd leaves the green pastures and ventures into places where he would rather not go to find his lost sheep. The sheep might have wandered into places that are dangerous, rocky, hilly or overgrown with thorns. It would have been much easier for the shepherd to say, “Well, I’ve still got 99.” No, he wanders into difficult places

to find that lost sheep. When the woman loses a coin, she lights a lamp, cleans her whole house, and looks diligently until she finds it. I know how she felt. I lost my appointment calendar earlier this year, and cleaned my office, 3 cars, bedroom and kitchen. When someone or something is lost, we often put forth a lot of effort to find it.

It's that way with regard to evangelism also. It is not easy at all. There are all kinds of small things that we have to deal with at our congregation. We often have trouble that cups, napkins, and paper plates disappear faster than they did before. We have trouble coordinating times for all the ministries. It has even happened that two groups have the same space at the same time. Things are not always as easy as we would like them to be. When we share the Gospel there are times when we go to places where we would rather not go. As we bring the Gospel to new people, there are all kinds of different things that we encounter. There are new foods that we learn to eat. We worship our Savior in some very different ways.

There are also other examples in our families. Think of how difficult it is for our families to bring up their children in the faith. When the children are very young, parents often feel that it is a waste of time to go to church. They don't get anything out of the service, and they feel like they are a distraction to other people. When our children get older, there are so many other things that are also important in their lives. There are also so many temptations for them to wander from our Lord. There are times when our children to wander far. It might seem as though they are as lost as the coin. Sometimes parent do know where they are going. Other times, we don't know where they are. Sometimes we share the Gospel with someone, hoping to bring them comfort, and they make it clear that they don't want to hear any more of this "nonsense." It is often much more difficult to share the Gospel with our family, friends, and neighbors than we ever thought.

II. Evangelism is worth the effort.

It was that way for our Lord. He died in sorrow and agony. Most of His followers had fled in fear. Those who remained wept. Yet when Christ rose from the dead. There was so much joy and celebration on this earth. There was even more joy in heaven when He ascended and took His place at the right hand of the Father. He was crowned with glory and honor as the Savior of the world.

Every time that a sinner repents there is great joy. Jesus celebrated with those who repented. He would often feast at their home. Friends and neighbors were invited, and even more people came to know Jesus as their Savior. In the early church there was a lot of anxiety when Peter preached the Gospel to a Roman and went to the home of a Gentile, but after Peter's report of what happened, the church praised God that God also granted repentance that leads to life to the Gentiles. The day when you were baptized brought great joy to someone. Maybe it was your parents or someone who shared the Gospel with you. It was a day of great joy. Think of some of the times when God has used you to seek and save someone who was lost. He might have sent you to a place that you didn't want to go. Maybe He sent you at a time that was very inconvenient. Maybe you thought that it was hopeless. Maybe you thought that you can't do this. But when God uses our weak, trembling voices to share the good news of Jesus as our Savior, He gives that simple message the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is important for us to realize that the results are in our Lord's hands. Our work is often difficult. It is sometimes tedious. It can be very frustrating, but we know that the results are assured. When

our Lord brings someone into our life, who needs to hear the Good News of Jesus, He will bless the message that we share. As the shepherd found the sheep and the woman found the coin, the Lord will also use us as His agent to find the lost and straying. He gives our hearts and all of heaven great joy when they are found and brought into our Lord's kingdom. Yes, there are times when the Gospel is rejected. There are times when we are ridiculed, but the Gospel we share has the power of the Holy Spirit. To dedicate our gifts and energies to such blessed work in which God promises such rich results should be for all of us pure joy and pleasure. When we get to heaven, we will see the fruits of our labor even clearer, and with all the angels of God, we will celebrate that God could even use people like us to spread His kingdom.

One of the great mistakes of today's church is a theology of glory with regard to evangelism. We figure that if we get the right formula, people will come knocking at our door. They will be the perfect church members with good offerings and wonderful kids, and they will be great leaders and workers in our congregation. These verses show that evangelism and pastoral work are not easy. It is often difficult and in places where we would rather not go. The people to whom God sends us are often running away or hard to find, but the Lord also gives us joy. He promises that every ounce of effort was worth it. It is a wonderful blessing when God gives us a glimpse of the joy there is in heaven over every sinner who repents. May God give us all that joy in Christ.

Amen.

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