**Sermon for Proper 19-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

09-14-25

Luke 15:1-10

The life of a shepherd is not an easy one. As someone who is familiar with shepherds and shepherding has said to me, the pictures that you see all the time of the shepherds sitting on the hillside, while the sheep are grazing peacefully, down in the valley, is simply not accurate.

 The shepherds are constantly right down in there, among the sheep, dealing with all sorts of different issues. The shepherds are in constant contact with the sheep; so much so that they smell like the sheep.

 When they are not in among the sheep, they are searching for missing sheep; sheep that have gotten themselves separated from the fold; sheep that have gone astray.

As the holy Scriptures make crystal clear, you and I are just like those sheep; we have all gone astray, leaving behind the good pasture of God’s word and his ways, and eternal life, for whatever seems more desirable to us, more worthy of our attention, more important, than God.

Even though we know that, whenever we fear, love, or trust in anything more than we do God, then, we have ourselves an idol, and thus, we have sinned against God, and we have broken the very first of His commandments.

Jesus Christ has come to seek and to save the lost. During his earthly ministry, tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around Jesus.

Many of them were certainly looking to be healed of many and various physical afflictions, even demonic possessions, but even more importantly, they were drawing near to hear what he had to say.

 As a result, the scribes and Pharisees; the men whom the people used to gather around to hear what they had to say, were jealous. The scribes and the Pharisees, experts in the law, were being upstaged by this roaming rabbi.

 He didn’t teach like they did, but instead, he unpacked God’s word as one who had authority. Jesus did not speak speculatively about God, his will, and his ways. Jesus proclaimed eternal truth; and the eternal truth that he proclaimed is; himself.

 Jesus Christ alone is the sinner’s redemption and eternal life. Just as it is today, some who heard him believed, and some did not.

Those who believed were as the sheep being brought home upon the shepherd’s shoulders, safe and sound, rescued from out of a world of danger, and certain death, with the shepherd himself rejoicing, calling all to celebrate with him, over the one who was lost, whom he has found.

What love such a shepherd must have for his sheep. Look at all of the trouble that one sheep can cause.

 What must it be like for a shepherd to search for a lost sheep? Sleepless nights, combing the countryside, working his way through every ditch and ravine, every patch of briers and brambles, until he finds that one lost sheep, who isn’t going to come running when he calls him, for a couple of reasons.

First of all, it’s likely tangled up in the brush and brambles, and even if it isn’t, it’s paralyzed with fear. When sheep are scared, they freeze.

 The Shepherd has to go into the brush, and get the sheep, and then, he has to carry it all the way back home, because it’s so stressed that it’s paralyzed; helpless. The shepherd has to do all of the work.

Jesus paints for us the picture of a shepherd who, despite being fatigued, scratched up, carrying this stinky, immobile, troublesome sheep; he is rejoicing!

 Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, has come, and he has rescued you out of a world of trouble and certain death, through the suffering of the cross. He bears helpless you upon his own shoulders, carrying you home; and despite the suffering, and the wounds, and the bleeding, he rejoices to do it.

He and all heaven rejoice for the one who was lost, but is now back safe and sound with him. Jesus Christ has brought you from eternal death to eternal life. He has done all of the work, and you have all of the benefit.

While this parable ought to be enough, Jesus follows it immediately with yet another parable, about a woman and a lost coin.

This woman lights a lamp and sweeps the house to find the one of her ten coins that is missing. The treasure of her household, perhaps, her bridal dowry, ten coins; and one is unaccounted for; missing. She will not rest until she finds it.

 You are the treasure of God’s household. Bethlehem Lutheran church, along with the entire church throughout the world, is the bride of Christ.

She exists to seek the lost and to strengthen the saved, in the name of Jesus Christ, using the tools that he has given to us; his word and his sacraments.

 The church, wherever she may be found, brings the light of the gospel of Christ into the darkness of this fallen world.

Each of us often needs our brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage us, and keep us from becoming separated, lost again, in that darkness.

 I encourage each of you to keep up with one another, especially if you’ve not seen someone here in a while. As a family in Christ, we are each other’s responsibility.

Jesus Christ is the good shepherd who loves each one of his sheep so much, that he goes out and searches for them, sparing no effort, suffering every wound, in order to bring them back to himself.

 His bride, the church, brings his light into every corner of this dark world; the good news that this man, Jesus Christ, welcomes sinners, just like you and me, and eats with them.

 Jesus brings us into his household, to share a celebratory meal with him, as he rejoices over each and every one of us repentant lost ones, every time that we turn back to him. Amen.