

Pentecost 16, 2010C

569 "In Adam We Have All Been One" Δ

*609 "Jesus Sinners Doth Receive"

611 "Chief of Sinners Though I Be"

"Jesus Saves Sinners"

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear [Jesus]. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

³So he told them this parable: ⁴"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷Just 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.

⁸"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:1-10)

Towards the beginning of today's Divine Service of the Word and following the words of the Invocation, we spoke those words from St. John's Epistle where he writes,

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9).

These very words are true. By them do we confess what God has made known—that none are without sin. All deserve condemnation—all deserve God to be set against them, including us.

This is why, following these very words we continue by saying, "Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned...We justly deserve your present and eternal punishment."

You say these same words! Therefore, consider! You are saying that you believe that you have no hope of yourselves, that you are lost, not as God wants you to be, that you do not do the things that you ought and do the very things that you ought not. By saying these words, you believe that you sin in thought, word, and deed by what you have done and by what you have left undone. You're saying that you believe that you deserve what God says the sinner deserves—punishment now and punishment eternally.

As you have just confessed, then, know that without a doubt that the words of our Lord Jesus apply to you. You are that lost sheep whom the Good Shepherd goes after until He finds. And finding you, He rejoices. You once were lost, but are now found.

All we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6). With the Psalmist, therefore, do we say, I have gone astray like a lost sheep (Psalm 119:176).

It is just such a one that the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for His sheep, seeks until He finds. And our Lord rejoices in the burden of paying the debt of your sin, bringing you home through the waters of your Baptism.

It is just such a one, a sheep having gone astray and the Lord finds, who seeks to hear the blessed and comforting words of our Lord spoken from his lips. To them, the words of our Lord are not rebuke or blame, but mercy and kindness.

Our Lord rejoices to receive and dine with sinners, those who acknowledge their sin and desire God's pardon and peace. Such a Savior is He. Therefore does He give you a banquet fit for kings, feeding you with the bounty of His Word, the blessing of His promise—Christ's body and blood.

Therefore do you come to hear the blessed words of Absolution, "sin forgiven," for you know that by these very words, you have life. You have life by Christ's Word, and there, by His Word, you know that God is nothing but good and gracious towards you. And by this Word of forgiveness, Jesus sustains you and preserves you—His child—no longer your own belonging to yourself, but to Him who laid down His life for you.

You are as the lost sheep whom the Shepherd finds. You are also as the lost coin in today's parable, whom the woman, diligently seeking, finds and rejoices in.

The two parables that Jesus tells us, that of the lost sheep and the lost coin, everywhere show what kind of God you have. It is not you who find Him. It is He who finds you and calls you His own through the waters of Holy Baptism. It is He who gathers you to Himself and to His beloved people.

He calls you by means of His Holy Word, and you hear, because you are His sheep and hear His voice (John 10:3).

It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

What comfort this gives to fearful and doubtful hearts, to tax collectors and sinners, the very ones whom society looks down on, ignores, and casts out as unworthy! But the Lord doesn't see things the same way the world does. The Lord judges differently than the culture and customs of our day. He looks at the heart (John 7:24). And where there is mercy and forgiveness sought in our Lord Jesus, there He gives it.

This is a far cry from how our Lord addresses the Pharisees and the scribes, even in our day. They judge according to appearance and despise the working of God, putting themselves in God's judgment seat. They determine by looks and how things appear to be rather than how things really are. They see the church as a place for the righteous and for holy saints, those who abound in good works left and right, and who hardly do wrong. They see the church as composed of those active in love and never scandalous. And they see the Christian as one who always does good, says words seasoned with salt, and is always joyful.

The Pharisee and the scribe believe themselves to be better than everyone else, to not be hypocrites like everyone else, and to be holier than everyone else. Thus, when the church is full of hypocrites, when things are not as they should be, when sinners are found in God's house and receive the blessing of the Lord, their assumption is that God can't be among them, for God would not receive sinners nor would He be with sinners.

But as our Lord says, **Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance** (Luke 5:31-32).

The Pharisee and the Scribe, because they think they're well, see no need for the true physician—Jesus Christ. And because of this, they receive God's Word of rebuke, as in our text. Unlike the Lord who seeks that which is lost, they revel in themselves and look down on others. They will not hear Words of forgiveness and welcome, just because they don't think that they need it.

But those who know that they are sick, these seek Jesus out where His Word is preached and where His body and blood are given. And there they are found, as our Lord says, **Where I am, there My servant will be also** (John 12:26). They will come to hear the Words of our Lord, who's very Word is Spirit and Life (John 6:63). And to them does our Lord speak the Word of forgiveness and welcome, and the Word of pardon and peace—that which was achieved on the cross and given to you now.

To you, this day, does the Lord speak such words. Your Lord finds you in your sin, and cleanses you of it. Your Lord calls you to change your ways, and by His grace, you do. And when you fall, He strengthens you that you remain in Him, pressing on in the faith and clinging to His Word.

Such a God do you have who comes to you in flesh and blood, dies your death on the cross, speaks in human voice, gives His own body and blood with the bread and with the wine, who receives you as you are, who seeks the sinner, who calls to repentance, who forgives, who has compassion, who exalts the humbled, and who rejoices in finding you and saving you, even through shame and cross, and death and resurrection.

As for the Pharisees and the Scribes, our Lord speaks words of rebuke, not that they remain in their hardness of heart or continue to think that they're holier and better than everyone else, but that they, too, recognize their sin and call on the Lord and so be saved.

The Lord keep us from self-righteousness and grant us to pray, "God, be merciful to me—a sinner," (Luke 18:13) calling on Christ Jesus for help and salvation, for so He is. Amen.

¹Luther

We should certainly be impressed by these beautiful comparisons and pictures, and such winsome and comforting words, so that from them we may learn to find comfort when a bad conscience and our sins accuse us. For we humans are all sinners and there isn't a one whom the devil hasn't frightened into the wilderness, nor anyone who after his baptism hasn't gone astray like a lost sheep and thus sinned against his God. Where there is sin, there the person is terrified before God. It is sin's nature to produce a frightened, discouraged spirit, troubled by disgrace and punishment. So, human reasons, as well as the Law's teaching, forces the conclusion that God is at enmity with sinners. A heart that knows itself to be guilty naturally feels fright, turns from grace, and anticipates punishment. But at this point is where power lies, that we, against our hearts and conscience³, join with Christ to say, I am a poor sinner, that I will not deny; however, I will not for that reason despair, as though God did not want me, because my Lord Jesus Christ says that poor sinner is just like a little sheep that has lost its shepherd and gone astray. Christ will not let such an erring sheep be lost, but will look for it and carry it back to the other sheep. That is attestation that because of sin he is not about to throw us out, but will rather, with all perseverance, endeavor to rescue us from sin and restore us again to grace. Moreover, he declares that he himself, along with the angels in heaven, will rejoice when sinners come to repentance and are converted.

The parable of the sheep and the shepherd especially illustrates this. It is no small matter when a sheep in the pasture wanders away from the shepherd into the wilderness. It cannot think for itself; at any moment it is in danger from the wolf who slinks after it, to grab and devour it. In this predicament it has no recourse; it can neither protect itself nor get back. By nature no animal is more vulnerable and defenseless than a sheep. The same is true of a sinner whom the devil has turned from God and his Word and brought into sin. He is not safe even a moment, because our enemy, the devil, as Peter says, sneaks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

In such jeopardy our only consolation is that we have a Shepherd, our dear Lord Jesus Christ, who accepts us and seeks us out, not to punish us for our sins and throw us into hell, but rather finds us, places us on his shoulder and rejoices to carry us home to safety from the world, where we have pasture and where every prospect pleases. You know how such a search takes place, namely, that he permits his Word to ring out plainly, from which we learn how heinous and burdensome our sins is which would throw us into eternal damnation. But God, in his fatherly love, was a compassionate toward us disobedient children and through his Son provided counsel and aid in our misery. It behooves us then to accept this gift with thanksgiving, believe in Christ, repent, and be converted to God.

This Gospel not only comforts the poor sinner because Christ is such a caring Shepherd and King who searches out the straying sheep, picks them up and carries them, but it also teaches us how we are to behave in relation to this Shepherd. It further teaches what we must do to be reinstated into Christ's kingdom and become beneficiaries of his grace and love, so that we who were once disoriented and lost might become loving and obedient sheep, now God's friends instead of his enemies. Like the publicans and sinners we should draw near to Christ, diligently and earnestly hear and learn his gospel, or as St. Paul states, the obedience of faith removes and annuls sin and all that is related to sin, namely, God's anger, eternal death, and damnation. It causes the sinner no longer to be a sinner, an enemy of God, but a justified friend of God and a joy to the angels in heaven.

¹ Eugene Klug (ed), *Sermons of Martin Luther*, "Third Sunday after Trinity (1533), Luke 15:1-10," (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 254-255.