

“And Now the Rest of the Story”

Ezekiel 34:11-24

Last week, our Gospel reading contained some challenging words of Jesus concerning the real cost of discipleship. You must be willing to completely disown, Jesus uses the word “hate” even your father and mother, son and daughter, yes even your own self. Nothing in this world is to be perceived as having any value or connection to us which would draw us away from the Lord. And we are compelled to hate anything which would tempt us or distract us from our duty as a disciple of Jesus.

The discipleship which Jesus describes is too costly for me, but not for Jesus. As I said, for a Gospel reading, there is not much “Good News” in the last verses of Luke 14, which we heard last week. But those words were the beginning of a larger narrative leading into a number of parables Jesus would tell the growing crowd. We had to wait until this week to hear the beautiful Gospel message that Jesus was proclaiming.

In the words of Paul Harvey, “And now, the rest of the story.” (Sort of) Our Gospel reading today only includes two of the parables that Jesus would tell the crowds – the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Coin. And for today, I especially want to focus in on the Lost

Sheep because of how closely it corresponds to the Old Testament reading from Ezekiel. And the Epistle reading aligns itself more closely than usual.

As I mentioned last week, in our three year lectionary series, the creators of it generally tie together the Old Testament reading with the Gospel reading. The Epistle readings week to week systematically goes through primarily the letters of Paul but does include other writers. This week we begin walking through First Timothy.

Paul describes his life as a Lost Sheep: “I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent” (that is, he willfully and with absolute malice opposed Christ and His church). He was a Lost Sheep. Elsewhere, Paul calls himself the “chief of sinners.” If our Good Shepherd seeks out the chief of sinners, a man like Saul of Tarsus, and shows patience and grace to him, don’t imagine there is anyone who God wants to “write off” as being not worth the effort to seek and save.

The connection between the Old Testament and the Gospel is very obvious today. Ezekiel proclaims, “For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I Myself will search for My sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness” [Ezek. 34:11-12].

Jesus our Good Shepherd rescued us on a day of clouds and thick darkness – where there was darkness over the land for three hours as He hung on a cross to pay the ransom price for the sin of the world. And as I said last week, you are that lost sheep that the Good Shepherd goes out to find and save. And you and I are the dumb sheep that wander off, get lost, fall in a hole and can't get out. I have given the Lord a million reasons to just let me wander off – thankfully He is a Good Shepherd.

It is solely by the grace of God that I am here today in the house of the Lord. It is totally His work. The Lord could not make it more clear than through the words of Ezekiel: “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. . . . I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered . . . I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak . . . I will rescue my flock . . . And I, the Lord, will be their God . . . I am the Lord; I have spoken.”

Last week, we heard Jesus tell the crowds about the cost of discipleship. To paraphrase Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jesus preaches the infinite worth of that which is seemingly worthless and the infinite worthlessness of that which is seemingly so valued. The Good News of salvation in Christ is of infinite value, yet it is treated with indifference and contempt. All the while, the temporary joys, relationships, and treasures of

this world which we cannot take out of this world, we cling to with all of our might.

When we stand in awe of the fullness of what the Law demands of us to be a disciple, when we heard Jesus say in our Gospel reading last week – His message to the crowd which He continues in our reading today, where He says, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple.” We quickly see that is a cost which we cannot pay.

The rest of the story is the fullness and completeness of how our Good Shepherd rescued us on a day of thick clouds and darkness. The rest of the story is the lengths that our Lord and Creator went to so that He could find us, share the good news with us that the cost for the guilt of our sin has been paid.

We are disciples of Christ our Lord because, and only because, Jesus our Good Shepherd fulfilled the promise made through the prophet Ezekiel, “I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. . . I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered . . . I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak . . . I will rescue my flock . . . And I, the Lord, will be their God . . . I am the Lord; I have spoken.” Amen.