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Pentecost 16

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Your Shepherd is Here”  
Text: Luke 15:1-10; Ezekiel 34:11-24

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The words of the Holy Gospel for today are Jesus’ sermon on Ezekiel 34.

In Ezekiel, God said: Enough. I’m going to come and shepherd My people. I’m going to come and search them out. I’m going to come and care for them. You know why? Because those who are supposed to, who were appointed to, aren’t doing it. Instead of caring for My sheep, they’re pushing them aside and goring them. Instead of feeding My sheep, they’re feeding themselves. Instead of leading them to safe pasture and good water, they’re trampling the pastures and muddying the waters.

So, ***“I will rescue My flock. . . . I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken.”***

Now, Ezekiel preached those words some 500 years *after* King David died. So when Ezekiel says that God will set up David as their shepherd, he’s not taking about the David who died over 500 years ago - he’s talking about the true David, the greater David, the one promised to David, the son of David who would sit on his throne forever. *He’s talking about Jesus.* Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Jesus, the shepherd Israel did not have. Jesus, who would rescue His people by laying down His life for them. Jesus, who did not come to be served, but to serve (Matt 20:28).

And now that Shepherd had come. Some recognized this and came “flocking” to Him. ***“[T]he tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.”*** And when that happened, Jesus was delighted. He would look at such people and see that *they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd* (Matt 9:36), and He had come to help them. Not by approving of their sin, but taking it away; by setting them free from their bondage to sin and giving them a new life. A life of hope, a life of faith. Being a *Good Shepherd*. . . .

But those who *should* have been shepherding Israel, caring for them and teaching

them and feeding them, instead looked at Jesus and grumbled: ***“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”*** So Jesus preaches to them. Three parables, two of which we heard today. For two reasons: (1.) To stop their grumbling, and (2.) to bring them into His flock. For even these Jesus has come to help, to feed, to care for - to be their Shepherd, too. That they may understand who He is, and the love He has come to bestow.

And so Jesus says: ***“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?”***

And the Pharisees and scribes are perhaps thinking to themselves here: What man of them? *None of them!* Why risk the 99 for the sake of the one? It shouldn't have wandered off anyway. It's probably too dumb to stay with the flock. But to preserve the 99, that - you see, Jesus - is what's called an “acceptable loss.” But even so, if one did find that sheep, why rejoice? It needs discipline, so it won't wander off again. *Hmm . . .*

Then Jesus says: ***“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?”***

Well, this parable makes a little more sense, for sure, you're talking about money here. Of course you'd look for lost money!

But then, Jesus continues, ***“And 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.’ ”***

*Um, no.* Because if you found this coin you've just been looking so hard for, why spend it on your neighbors? They didn't help you look for it, did they? And why would you spend so much time looking for it if you were just going to spend it? *Hmm . . .*

***“Just 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. . . . [T]here is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”***

Joy? Why? If a sinner repents, he's just doing what he was supposed to do. And he shouldn't have sinned in the first place! So why rejoice? These are dumb parables, Jesus. Nobody does these things.

Well, not nobody. **Jesus does them.** The true Shepherd. The Good Shepherd. The Shepherd for whom there are no “acceptable losses.” The Shepherd who laid down

His life for *all* the sheep. The Shepherd who searches and does not give up. The Shepherd who loves His sheep more than you can possibly imagine. The Shepherd whose heart is filled with joy whenever one of His sheep is found. No matter who they are, no matter where they have wandered, and no matter how long they have been lost, there is joy in heaven and in the heart of the Good Shepherd when each and every sheep is back, safe and sound, in His arms.

*And this is still true today.* For today too, there are many who are supposed to be shepherding God's people, but aren't.

There are those who are lost in sin that are not being called back. Instead, those sins are being called okay, because that's where the sheep want to be, and we don't want to upset them. There are those who have wandered from the flock and not searched for. There are those who are being trampled and not cared for. There are those who are being pushed aside and gored and called "acceptable losses."

And yes, some of this, or all of this, has happened to you. You have been hurt, and you have hurt others. You have been trampled, and you have stepped on others. You have wandered and followed the allurements of sin, and you have been lost. You have repented, you also have grumbled.

So what does that mean? *That your Shepherd has come for you.* The Good Shepherd, who searches you out, who calls and gathers His flock, who is delighted and filled with joy when all of you "tax collectors and sinners" come here each Sunday and draw near to Him who has come for you. And He washes you in His water of new life. And He feeds and strengthens you by His Body and Blood. And He restores you with His forgiveness and binds up and heals you, and He guides and teaches by His Word. And there is nothing that your Shepherd would rather be doing, and no place He'd rather be, than here for you and caring for you. Not because you're good, but because He is. And not because you're loveable, but because He is love.

For whether it's in first century Israel or 21st century Vienna, Virginia, the Lord of life is here to give life. To raise you from death even as He is risen from the dead. That you may see His cross not as the place of His defeat at the hands of the Romans, but as the throne of His glorious victory over sin, and the staff by which He now shepherds you.

For, you see, Ezekiel's words are not a thing of the past, but are still being fulfilled for us today. For still, God comes to shepherd His people. The promised son of David - son of God and son of man; Immanuel: *God with us* - is here to care for His flock. Here to care **for you**. *That you may be His own, and live under His in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.*

(Small Catechism: Explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles Creed) That you may be set free from sin and death. That you may know the joy of His salvation here, *and* rejoice with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. That whatever comes upon you in this world and life, you live under the protection and care of your Good Shepherd, and follow where He leads.

For He will never lead you to bad pastures, polluted waters, or places of harm. No. These things are *in* our sinful world, to be sure! But your Good Shepherd has come to rescue you from them when you wander off into them. He comes to lead you in His way, the way of the cross, for that is the way of life, not death. He has made it so, by His own death on the cross. That you may live.

So come, O sinners, and flock to your Saviour, your Shepherd. Come and be washed clean from your sin. Come and be fed by His Body and Blood. Come and find rest in Him. Come, and fear not. For ***“This man receives sinners and eats with them!”***

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.