

15 September 2019  
Pentecost 14

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Each and Every One”

Text: Luke 15:1-10 (1 Timothy 1:12-17; Ezekiel 34:11-24)

*A little shorter sermon today since we had a little longer liturgy today, our annual Narrative Divine Service.*

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

One sheep. It's only one sheep Jesus. You still have 99. Don't worry about it. It'll probably just wander off again anyhow. Relax. There will be more. Your flock will grow. It's just one sheep.

And one coin. It's only one coin Jesus. You still have 9. Your bank account is still plenty full. Don't waste your time. It's just one coin.

But that's the way of man, not of God. For God, each and every one is important, valuable, and worth His time and effort. Not sheep or coins, but sinners. He doesn't want even one lost.

Maybe it doesn't always seem that way. After all, the Bible is full of big words, words like *all*, and *world*, and *cosmos*. Jesus feeds 5,000 and then 4,000 at a time. 3,000 are baptized on the day of Pentecost. The picture of heaven in Revelation is of a great multitude that no one could count. And so, perhaps, it's easy to think we get lost in the crowd.

But then we have other pictures of Jesus, too. Like when He was on His way to a centurion's house because His daughter was very sick. Jesus was going *just for her*. Until a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years dared to touch the hem of His garment - then Jesus stopped *just for her*. To speak kindly to this desperate and scared little lamb of His. Jesus spends time talking to Nicodemus one-on-one at night. *Just to him*. He stops at a well in Samaria and spends time talking to a woman no one else wanted to be with or talk to. *He's there just for her*. And how many more stories are there? Of folks Jesus knows and cares about; of how no one gets lost in the crowd with Him.

But sometimes we do want to just blend in, don't we? Like when you're in school, in class, and you don't want the teacher to call on you. Or at work, when you don't want more work to be given to you. Sometimes we just want to blend in with God and at church, too. Because of our sin. Because of our shame and guilt. I don't want others to

know what I've been up to. I don't want them to know my doubts and fears. I don't want anyone to know how really and truly unworthy I am and how unchristian I've been again this week. How I've blown up the commandments again this week. How I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. How if there was a police line-up with 9 criminals and you, no one would finger you as the Christian. So just blend in. *Pretend* everything's alright.

But it doesn't work, does it? The sin and guilt and shame are still there, undealt with.

Until Jesus deals with them. Jesus who knows you and all you try to hide. No one else may notice the one sheep that has gone astray, but Jesus does. The Good Shepherd knows each one by name. And one coin missing from the purse isn't a noticeable difference - unless you're Jesus. That's why He came. To search for every lost sheep and every lost coin - every lost and hiding sinner - and bring them back again. Forgive them, love them, care for them. For you.

That's, in fact, what Jesus was doing that day. Spending time with sinners. Loving them, caring for them, forgiving them. That's why the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling. They thought Jesus was not hallowing God's Name by hanging out with those folks! But Jesus wanted them all to know that He was, in fact, hallowing God's Name by hanging out with those folks. Because He was making it known what kind of God we have. Not a God who loves us because we don't need to be forgiven, but a God who loves us - each and every one of us - so much that He laid down his life for us and our forgiveness.

For that's what brings Him joy. Not 99 righteous persons who don't need to repent. (And let me know if you ever find those 99 persons!) There is joy in heaven and among the angels over one sinner - each and every sinner - who repents. Who is found by God and finds her life and hope and forgiveness in Him. That she is not lost in the crowd nor lost forever, but singled out, cared for, and died for.

That love is what changed St. Paul. He never blended in. First, he stood out as a Pharisee. He was a Pharisee's Pharisee, the best of the best. And it ain't braggin' if you can back it up. No one could match his dedication to the Law, or his zeal in persecuting the church (Philippians 3). But then Jesus came to him and found him. Still he didn't blend in, but stood out - now not as the best, but as the worst of sinners. The *foremost of sinners*, as we heard him say today. But to such a one as him, Jesus came. To love him, mercy him, die for him, and forgive him. He didn't deserve it. He was lost lost. Until Jesus found him.

And so would Jesus do for you. That's the kind of God we have. The way Jesus is here on earth is the way it is in heaven. God isn't one way here and one way in heaven, but the same here and there, yesterday, today, and forever.

So if Jesus is hanging out with sinners here, who do you think fills heaven's courts?

Sinners. If Jesus is eating with sinners here, who has a seat at the heavenly feast? Sinners again. Who fills the heavenly choir? Sinners. Not those who don't care about their sin, but those who repent. Not those who think they've earned it or deserve it by their own goodness, but exactly those who don't. Sinners whose sins have been paid for, atoned for, forgiven. The lost sheep, the lost coin, lost you, now found, now home.

And the way Jesus is and the way it is in heaven is the way it is here, now, in Jesus' church as well. For who fills these chairs? Sinners. Who has a place at this table? Sinners again. Who sings these hymns and confesses the faith? Sinners. Every week. And every week, acknowledging this fact and repenting of the reality of our sinfulness, our lostness, our fallenness, our not-good-enough-ness, we get to hear those joyful words of forgiveness. Grace that is for all of you and each one of you. A baptism that is for all of you and each one of you. And Body and Blood that is for all of you and each one of you. Because Jesus is here for all of you and each one of you. For each and every lost sheep, lost coin, lost person. And there's no place He'd rather be. Let that sink in. There's no place that He'd rather be than here, with you, with sinners, loving you, rescuing you, being your God.

For Jesus is Ezekiel's shepherd, come to search for His sheep. Jesus is Ezekiel's David, come to be enthroned on the cross to be the kind of King and God we need - the one who dies our death and gives us His life. Who has come to find us. And we are found.

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.