

Trinity 3, 2020

“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” (St. Luke 15.10)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Last Sunday, the Collect taught us to ask God for a perpetual fear and love of His holy Name. Not a natural fear, like the fear we might have of the dark; or of thunder and lightning; or of dogs, but holy fear – a deep reverence for the Lord. Such a love for Him that we never want to disappoint Him.

The people in last week’s Gospel – those who made excuses and did not attend the great supper – they lacked this holy fear. One said that he had just bought some property and he wanted to go and see it; another said that he had just bought five pairs of oxen and he wanted to try them out; and a third said that he had just got married so he wouldn’t be coming either. We also make excuses for not attending the great Supper – the Lord’s Supper -- to which we are invited every Sunday. And, as we heard in last week’s Gospel, our excuses usually involve material possessions, our work or relationships. In the end, nothing in our life should come before the Lord. He is, after all, the One Who has saved us by the precious Blood of His Son, and adopted us into His family. And so, let us seek the gift of holy fear, so that we may draw closer to Christ.

In this morning’s Gospel, we are given two parables – one about the lost sheep and one about the lost coin. The story about these lost things is really a continuation from last week. For example, imagine if those from last week’s parable were now described as the lost sheep. Look where their excuses got them! They are off by themselves, separated from the rest of the flock and from the shepherd. In fact, they are so lost they cannot find their own way home.

If you have ever been lost, you know how scary it can be. Some people feel their heart beating very fast; others get sweaty palms; others begin to cry. It is no fun at all being lost! The thing is, we can get lost spiritually – that’s the point of today’s Gospel. If we make excuses for not coming to Church; if we make excuses for our temper; if we make excuses for spending our money unwisely; if we make excuses for wasting our time; if we do these things, there is something happening

inside us that is not good: we are saying to God, “I don’t need You. I will do this my way. Don’t worry, God, I’ve got this. I know what I am doing.”

It doesn’t take long for that attitude to get us lost. The truth is, there are so many things in life that we know nothing about. However, God does know so we should seek to lean on Him and trust Him, instead of ignoring Him.

The Rev. J.I. Packer a well-known Anglican Priest and author, says that one of our tendencies is to walk independently from God. He’s right! Deep down inside us, we have this desire to do things on our own. What is behind that? Well, we have a desire for control. It can be uncomfortable not knowing the answers to: what and when and how and where. Strangely enough, even though we are just people – mere mortals – we think that we should have all these answers. In fact, we think we should be able to predict and orchestrate the answers or outcomes that we want. ...What is behind that thinking? Pride – an unhealthy pride that causes us to think more highly of ourselves than we should, and therefore to dismiss the importance of our relationship with God. This is exactly why, in today’s Epistle, St. Peter says, “Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, for He careth for you”.

The evidence of the Lord’s care for us, even when we wander off from Him or turn our backs on Him, is obvious in the parable of the lost sheep. The shepherd leaves all the others in order to look for the lost one. In other words, the lost sheep is valuable to the shepherd. He cares about it. It belongs to Him. This is important for us to know and to believe. We are so precious to God that He sent His only-begotten Son to be humiliated and to suffer and to bleed and die for us on the Cross. Jesus, our Good Shepherd came down from Heaven in order to find us and rescue us. He truly cares for us. Through Him we have been made members of Christ and the children of God; and yet, so often, we give Him excuses for not doing the things He asks us to do.

Still, the Lord actively pursues us. The Shepherd goes after the lost sheep. Instead of saying, “Oh well, I have 99 others,” He goes out searching. How? How does God pursue us? One commentator gives this answer: “What can it be but the workings of conscience, its misgivings, its stings, its wounds? What can it be but visions of future wrath? Or it may be that the Lord finds us by loss of friends, loss of health, loss of employment – some disappointment where we were so sure”. The thing is,

our Good Shepherd has come to be with us and also to dwell in us by His Spirit; so He prompts us and speaks to us in many, many ways, always with the hope that we will turn to Him and draw closer to His Heart of Love.

This turning back or turning around, is called 'repentance. And, it is what the Lord identifies after both the shepherd and the woman have found what was lost.

"Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost". Then Jesus said to those who were present, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over 99 just persons which need no repentance".

Repentance, or turning around, says J.I. Packer is often neglected by us, even by Christians. Why? Because it is costly. It involves reshaping our life in a radical way. It involves learning to pray, "Thy will be done" instead of "my will be done". Because repentance is radical, many people attempt to adapt the Bible to suit themselves. As Packer explains, we may attempt to be Christian without repentance -- while continuing in the same direction -- without actually turning and following Christ. That is impossible.

It is costly to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is also the way of eternal life, peace and great joy. It is the true way – the only way – that offers us hope.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...