

A Good Shepherd Who Finds All His Lost Sheep based on Luke 15:1-10 and Isaiah 40:6-11, David Jahnke

I am starting a sermon series on Luke who was responsible for the narratives of Christ's birth. Without Luke, we would not have all the great Christmas stories nor any of the great carols we sing in December. So props to Luke for that. And from the beginning of his gospel, Luke makes clear what he is writing about. "For unto you is born this day a savior, the Messiah..." Unto you...; the you here is you and you and you and every you out there. God is coming to every lost child of his. That is one of the points of today's parables. God meets every human being in Jesus Christ because Jesus is the Son of Man-- the essence of all Humanity through whom every human was made and the light inside us all. This breadth of God's salvation is what I will speak to today. There are at least 6 types of YOUs for whom the savior is born.

The first is the lowly shepherds who first heard this news from the angels. More than any other evangelist, Luke has a particular care and concern for the poor so it is no surprise that they are the first to hear news that a savior has been born unto them and go see him.

Another You is clear from Luke's setting his gospel during the reign of Ceaser Augustus while Quirinius was governor. The righteous remnant of Israel suffering under the oppressions of Rome would finally receive their long-awaited savior. And Jesus would find plenty of time for the righteous during his ministry. But they would not just need to be saved from outside oppressors but from the oppression of their own self-righteousness.

This brings us to the third group that Jesus came to save-- sinners. And not in a Pauline sense of us all being sinful. But rather those who were excluded and ostracized because of their pattern of sinful behavior. This was one of the biggest scandals of Jesus' ministry, big enough that Luke recalls two times when the authorities questioned Jesus about this. More about this shortly.

A fourth category of lost people comes from Luke being the author of the book of Acts, and Luke being a Gentile convert. Luke knew that the nations surrounding Israel did not know God and thus needed a savior as well. And he wrote about the miraculous spread of the gospel to the nations through the acts of the apostles. This, in the modern day, is those who don't know the breadth of God's love; those who are not a part of a covenant community rooted in love and mercy.

I learned from Shirley yesterday that Bob was unchurched growing up but was reached through Shirley. And he had a fullness of life in and through the church that an introvert like himself would have missed without the blessings of a covenant community. The same goes for me by the way. Being a part of a covenant community forces us into the blessings of fellowship and community service.

The fifth group was the sick whom Jesus healed time and again. And the sixth and biggest group is the dead; those lost to perishability. Jesus had to find this largest group so he entered death and shined the light of eternity on them.

This incredible breadth of God's salvation really hit home this week. Because everywhere I turned, there seemed to be stress and anxiety and broken-ness. My family was back from Korea and the boys were terribly jet-lagged for their first week of school. Everybody seemed to be sleeping and waking others up at different times. My poor mother had a hernia and internal bleeding this week-- a week after an Alzheimer's diagnosis. Two people I spoke to shared recent bouts of depression. And hardest of all was losing Bob.

Thank God for wonderful news from Luke of a Divine Shepherd leaving his flock in heaven in order to find every lost sheep on earth. No matter what the circumstances in which you feel lost, our God is pursuing YOU with love that is beyond measure and cannot fail.

If you ever feel like an outsider; like there is just not quite enough love in your life or community or family, we want to call you brother or sister and will do our best to love you accordingly. And we will not always succeed just as families don't but we want to be a part of your extended family.

If you feel unworthy-- like you do not deserve love-- due to mistakes or sins or just melancholy, remember that Jesus would just as soon hang out with you as anyone. Today's second parable has a woman seeking a valuable coin. You are the coin-- you are more precious than gold, silver or diamonds. You have so much value and ability. You sparkle with beauty. Do not forget it.

If illness is striking you or a loved one, remember that Jesus healed all kinds of diseases which had no cure at the time and his Spirit can do so anytime. The same Spirit is also advancing medicine every day. So the perfect cures of the Kingdom of heaven are becoming more and more of a reality.

If death is haunting you, research the resurrection.

And if there is not anything in particular with or around you that makes you feel lost and is in need of salvation. And yet you do not sense God's presence, remember that there were 99 sheep who were not lost. And Jesus left them behind. And when he was asked the first time why he was hanging with sinners, he said doctors need to be present to the sick. So be glad that you are basically well.

I think the authorities were a little jealous. This great teacher and healer was neglecting them in favor of sinners! So he reminded them that their faith and morality and education and daily bread and health all meant that they were already found by God. And he was seeking the lost and unwell!

We too might want Jesus to be a little more present to us. But do we have all that we need, including faith in God? Daily bread? A strong moral foundation? Awareness of love? Then we have been found. And Jesus leaves us huddled with the other 99 to go about saving the lost.

And he does not compel the 99 to go with him, but we have that choice. And if we want a fuller measure of his presence, we will follow him through hill and vale, town and city to where he is at work, shepherding those who do not know His providential care like we do.

And as we go, we should hear the same Word that God had for Isaiah about comforting and feeding his people. He also told Isaiah-- "Cry out!" Immediately we might think, "Cry out?! I am no soapbox preacher!"

God responds, "Don't you want to bear Good News? Have you not noticed that more and more of my flocks are being fed? Have you not seen that more and more of my lambs are being healed and comforted? Are you not paying attention to how I am gathering my people together from all nations, tribes and religions? Love is crying out from every hill and valley. Peace is crying out. Justice and hope; daily bread and living waters all crying out! Don't you hear their voices? Don't you want to join them?"

Now the Israelites had been lost in Babylonian exile for decades when this Word came to them. Many of them surely had their doubts. But shortly after Isaiah's prophecy, Babylon was beginning to crumble. Suddenly another King-- Cyrus of Persia marched his troops into Babylon which offered very little resistance. And that Persian King proclaimed the best of news to the Israelites and all other exiles-- they were free. And God shepherded them back to Jerusalem.

We too may have our own doubts about hopeful prophecies. We look at what is happening in the middle east, North Korea, France. Today we remember the great symbols of our own nation crumbling down just 15 years ago and other foundations seeming to crumble into the present! But when things are crumbling, we remember that God's Word is sure. He was in charge in Babylon and He is now. And He will not only shepherd us through and out of every personal trial, he is shepherding the entire world out the messes we create, gradually bringing all the earth and all her peoples into the peace, prosperity, hope and love of His Kingdom. Take comfort in this and take hope in this...AND take part in this through the one who can do far more abundantly in us than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and forevermore. Amen

