

“LIVING LENT as People of the Resurrection: PEOPLE”
Luke 15:3, 8-10; John 10:11, 14-18

11 “I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—

15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—

and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.

They too will listen to my voice,

and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—

only to take it up again.

18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.

This command I received from my Father.”

19 The Jews who heard these words were again divided.

20 Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad.

Why listen to him?”

21 But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon.

Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

22 Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter,

23 and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade.

24 The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying,

“How long will you keep us in suspense?

If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

25 Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe.

The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me,

26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;

no one will snatch them out of my hand.

29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all;

no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.

30 I and the Father are one.”

31 Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him,

32 but Jesus said to them,

“I have shown you many good works from the Father.

For which of these do you stone me?”

33 “We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied,

“but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

Introduction

Four times in chapter 10 of John’s Gospel, Jesus says he will “lay down his life for the sheep.” In one of his brilliant “I AM” sayings, Jesus says, “I, yes, I Am The (unabashedly using the definite article)

The Good Shepherd,” the One foretold by Ezekiel. “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them... I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights will be their grazing land... I myself will tend my sheep declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays” (Go home and read all of Ezekiel 34. It’s about Jesus).

I. Do Lost People Matter to God? (vs.11-18)

We heard Jesus say, “I know my own sheep and my own know me. And I lay down my life for the sheep.” Why does he say this and then actually do it? “Do lost people matter to God?” Building upon the three parables found in Luke 15, Jesus emphasizes: “Yes, yes, and yes.” A lost sheep, the lost coin, a lost son. And what has Jesus done to rescue you? To find you? To forgive you? “Yes, yes, and yes – I lay down my life for you.”

Theologian Richard Niebuhr pointed out long ago (in 1937 even then), how American Christianity tends to preach a gospel without judgment and a Christ without a cross. We want to be happy. We want to be positive. We want to overlook the almost unbelievable problems we face today. Yet a longer time ago (around A.D. 55), Paul wrote “I know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (I Corinthians 2:2).

Fleming Rutledge is a retired Episcopalian priest and theologian. When asked, “Why did the Son of God die in the worst possible way?” she replied, “That’s the point here. Crucifixion was specifically designed to be the worst of the worst. It was so bad, good Roman citizens didn’t discuss it in public. It was so horrible, so disgusting, so *obscene*—that’s the word they used to describe it – obscene.

Asked “Why this method and not another?” she responds so clearly. “Because it corresponds to the depth of depravity caused by human rebellion against God. It shows us just how bad things really are with us. No wonder we don’t want to look at it.”

Think about it: How do we measure the size of a fire? By the number of firefighters and fire engines sent to fight it. How do we measure the seriousness of a medical condition? By the amount of risk doctors tell us in prescribing treatments or surgical procedures. How do we measure the gravity of sin and the incomparable vastness of God’s love for us? By looking at the magnitude of what God has done for us in Jesus, the Son of God who gave his life, put to death like a common criminal for our sake and in our place.

As we Live Lent As People of the Resurrection, I would want to combine *Christus Victor* (that’s the emphasis on Jesus defeating Satan and how he won the victory over everything that would destroy us), yet not letting go of substitution, *Christus Crucifixus Pro Nobis* (that’s Christ crucified in our place

and on our behalf). John Calvin put it this way: “Our salvation is dearer to the Son than his own life.” We sing it: “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.” Remember: in Judaism, thousands of sheep had been offered in sacrifice for their shepherds. But here, by a surprising reversal, the shepherd is sacrificed for the sheep.

Jesus amazes in his self-talk. “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me. Oh no! I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

II. Does God Matter to Lost People? (vs.19-33)

Then comes the inevitable conflict. The people who heard these words were again divided. Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?” He says he has the power to lay down his life and the power to take it up again? But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” Jesus is either demonic or divine.

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter. It was Hanukkah, the illumination of houses and synagogues. It says that those who were there gathered around Jesus said, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.”

A Christian believer now for 45 years, I have no doubt that lost people matter to God. But I deeply question whether lost people matter to God’s people. Do we really believe that people are lost without Christ? For those who even think about it, many people really believe we can be right with God (and have eternal life) if we are simply good enough. Goodness has been substituted for holiness and so we seem to believe most people who try hard enough will earn a passing score. Others operate from some deep conviction that a loving God would never make us live with the consequences of choosing sin over His love. Someone said, “The Cross may make great jewelry but it is optional in terms of salvation.”

At our meeting of elders last Tuesday (the Session), we got our first look at the results of the congregation survey we offered last month. “What are the things most important to you with 1st Presbyterian Church?” The top three responses were worship, music, and friends. And that’s wonderful. I am glad for the positive feedback about the things we do here at church. But one of the lowest responses was outreach, sharing Christ, inviting people. Unsurprisingly, I’m not so glad about that. How often Pastor Chris and I write or say – “Invite, invite, invite.” I know I need to do better at this. I know the church needs to be better about this because we know what happens if and when we don’t.

It’s birthday season in my family. My mom has her 23rd birthday tomorrow!?! Leap year times four – she will be 92. Last week, grandson Peter turned 4. How fun is that! Mine comes next month and son Mike in April (64 and 33 – he’s catching up! The first time more than half my age).

We celebrate birthdays but rarely speak of New Birth. Maybe that's because we have more birthdays than New Births. We make elaborate provisions to celebrate one more year on this planet but rarely make any provision for a person experiencing the 1st or 10th or 50th year of their eternal life with a new found faith in Jesus. We can get upset when someone close to us forgets to give us a gift for another birthday, but seem unperturbed when the gift of eternal life goes unclaimed. Heaven forbid we step out of our comfort zones of worship, music and friends to make the Gospel accessible to those who do not yet know Jesus.

In Luke 4, Jesus says, "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. In Matthew 9 he told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Conclusion

Friends the cause of Christ is "to seek and save the lost". It can seem simple enough...but sometimes the human heart can miss the heart of God. Do lost people matter to you?

In school we learned that Louis Pasteur was the pioneer of immunology. He lived at a time when thousands of people died each year of rabies. He worked for many years on a vaccine. Just as he was about to begin experimenting on himself, a nine-year old, Joseph Meister, was bitten by a rabid dog. The boy's mother begged Pasteur to experiment on her son. Pasteur injected Joseph for ten days—and the boy lived. Decades later, of all the things Pasteur could have had etched on his headstone, he asked for three words: JOSEPH MEISTER LIVED.

What three words would you ask for? I might ask for these three: JESUS MY SAVIOR.
Let us pray together.

Luke 15:3, 8-10

Then Jesus told them this parable: Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'

In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."