**Luke 15:1-10 September 11, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 15 here re-reading these words. “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 when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Is there such a thing as acceptable losses in your life? Acceptable losses is a military term that speaks about the cost of engaging an enemy, or going through with something risky or dangerous where you know there will be losses, but the ends would justify the means in this situation. If a few men get wounded or killed it’s an acceptable loss to the good that will come from this mission’s success. In the grand scheme of the war the loss was acceptable, but certainly not to the ones who lost their lives. We can see examples of acceptable losses in other areas too. I looked up the average percent that is lost to shoplifting for large stores like Meijer every year, and found that it was about 3%. This isn’t something that the store is happy about, but at the end of the day it’s an acceptable loss. They don’t go searching for these lost and stolen items, they do what they can to deter it, but they know that every year, 3% will be lost. It’s no different in food service where food is dropped on the floor or an order is done incorrectly and the food has to be disposed of. There is an acceptable loss to incompetence and that’s just how it goes, you can’t hire perfect workers and they are going to make mistakes. Loss when it comes to possessions is frustrating and hurts the bottom line of a companies profits, but it’s different when we’re talking about people. Loss is acceptable when it happens to others, or even welcomed if it’s someone that you find to be lesser than, to be inferior, to be bad, but loss is unacceptable in a situation where it involves someone you love and care about. Which is so beautifully illustrated and shown to us this morning in the parable of the lost sheep. Living in Kansas taught me a little bit about owning cattle, but I will admit I am no expert. What I did learn though was that there is a certain level of acceptable loss when it comes to owning and herding animals. You leave the cattle out to graze, and you do check them, but things happen to them outside of your control. They get sick, they get attacked by predators, they get lost, and that’s just how it goes. You would search for a missing animal perhaps for a while, but it’s not the end of the world, you move on with your life, you have so many other animals and they need to be taken care of. To stop everything and look for one lost animal is crazy, but that’s the foreign and crazy love that God has for us.

Man is not in the eyes of God, an acceptable loss. If that were so, then God would have simply destroyed all and started over. I heard just this week a critic of Christianity talking about the flood and how unrealistic it was that the ark made by Noah and his family was so large. His argument was that if you only needed two of every animal, then why was the boat so big? He never stopped to think for just one second, that the boat was made so large, to house the unrepentant hordes of people who laughed and mocked Noah for building it. Destruction was never God’s plan, sin and death were not God’s plan from the beginning, it was man who sinned and through sin came the infection of death that we all suffer from. But God does not seek destruction, and he doesn’t turn a blind eye to the lost. You can think of God’s continued care for his chosen people all throughout the Old Testament, through enslavement in Egypt, to wars and kings and enemies and problems, countless moments of their own rebellion and idolatry and how God continued to care for them and not just write them off as an “acceptable loss”. You can think of Jesus in his ministry, as we find here in Luke 15, sitting and eating with tax collectors and other sinners, traveling outside of Israel to Gentile lands to seek out the lost and those who the Pharisees and tax collectors would see as not worth the time or the effort. If Jesus only came for the 99 supposed righteous, he would have never left Jerusalem, and there would be no ministry to the crowds and those who were lost and hurting. Once he reached an appropriate age he would sneak off to Jerusalem to be killed and win salvation for the chosen people of God. But Jesus didn’t come for those who saw themselves as worthy of salvation, he came for the lost, the hurting, the ones who would be seen by others as an acceptable loss, and yet was seen by God as a beloved child.

But loss is part of life, and in everything there is loss of time, finances, effort and energy. You have to weigh the cost, that’s part of being a faithful steward right? Just next week, on Stewardship Sunday we will discuss what it means to be a faithful steward of what God has blessed us with, more than just the money that we have and our income but everything that we’ve received from God including our vocations, the places God has called us, and the influence we have with those around us. Being a faithful steward means we have to think about these things, even when it comes to reaching out to others, and in our lives we see our neighbors, friends, family, acquaintances, coworkers, enemies, rivals, strangers, you can think of anyone that you come into contact with and just say to yourself, they are too far gone. It costs too much. We can’t help them, and frankly, they aren’t worth our time. Like a building that has been condemned, there’s nothing we can do, it must be torn down, it would be a waste of resources to try to fix it. It’s an acceptable loss. But that’s property, not people. And that’s the difference. While we in our lives write others off, it is not that way with God. No matter how evil, terrible, how antagonistic they are against God and his church. There is always a place for them in the kingdom of God, no matter what the earthly cost. Jesus says, “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.” That doesn’t make sense…that’s not logical, that’s not practical. That doesn’t fit how we measure success in our lives and in our minds and how we weigh the costs, and what we would do, and that’s the whole point. Our love is limited, to our own detriment. It is conditional, it’s focused on a return of investment, and we are willing to cut the cord and eat acceptable losses of others for the good of our bottom line. But it’s not that way with God, and we must wrestle with the fact that our ways, are not God’s ways, and we have to think outside of profit, for the good of the person.

Because if you see the lost as just…a stranger. If you see them as just someone out there, someone who has sinned, someone who has done wrong, or isn’t like you or me or the “righteous ones.” It’s easy to shut them out, cut them off, leave them in their sinful state and move on with your life. But if you see them as your brother, your sister, or even for just a moment as God sees them, as your beloved child, you’d do anything, and pay any cost to help them. I don’t know if it’s because of the recent news of the loss of Queen Elizabeth II, but I was thinking the other day of a moving scene from the film “Dunkirk.” Dunkirk came out in 2017 and was about the evacuation of Allied soldiers in World War II. Dunkirk is where they have retreated to, and there are thousands of troops hoping to be rescued as German forces will soon arrive. The film is tense and you get a sense that help won’t arrive in time, the Navy won’t be able to save all of them and they were doomed. And then, the Royal Navy Commander, looks out and sees something in the distance, he’s looking through binoculars and sees something that he can’t believe, and when asked what it is he says, “Home.” And the climax of the film, is a fleet of ships, ships captained by citizens from Great Britain, ships that aren’t uniform at all, they don’t look the same, this isn’t some sort of well coordinated military operation, it is a group of civilians who heard what was going on and came to save these men from certain death. They risked their lives and made the trip to a warzone to help these men, because they cared for them, cared because it was as if they were their own sons, and they came to help them. They were not just “acceptable losses” they were not strangers, they didn’t weigh the cost of their property or their lives, they knew that these men would be lost, and so they left their families and went to go find them and save them.

That’s what Christ has done for us in our lives of sin, he has come to us in the tragedy of our own disobedience and saved us. Saved us not because of our worth but saved us because of his love. He doesn’t save us out of obligation and chastise us and yell at us for getting lost, he rejoices that we have been found, and carries us back into fellowship with him. It is a passive reception of his work and his love, the sheep’s only action is getting lost, not being found, once the sheep is back with the shepherd we don’t speak about what they do we speak only about what is done for them. How they are carried and cared for and loved. This is our lives as Christians, as God’s beloved children, it is a passive reception, not an active earning. This is our joy, as we rejoice together in our salvation and the salvation of others. This is also how we are called to do what so many brave men and women did, to go and find the lost and bring them home.

We the church do not wear uniforms, we don’t all look the same, we don’t all drive the same cars or say the same things. Like the ships of civilians who came to Dunkirk, when we reach out the lost it won’t be coordinated like some military exercise, but it will be done out of care for those who would otherwise be lost. Those who are lost in sin are as helpless as a lost sheep in the wilderness. There is no hope for their survival on their own. Which means that Christ works through us to come to them and bring them home. To rejoice at their return, not chastise them for being lost and to share with them the joy that comes from being God’s own beloved child.

There are no acceptable losses in the kingdom of God, and we can’t fall into the temptation to think that God has written off any person to a lifetime of suffering and separation. Instead we are called to see the lost as family, and care about them enough to go to them and tell them about the forgiveness of their sins and the love of God. May God keep you in his love, throughout the moments in your life where you feel lost in your sin. May God remind you of his love, in the times when you feel like an acceptable loss in this world. And may we sing with confidence the words of our final hymn this morning, the wonderful words in the hymn “Amazing Grace” that sums up our lives. “I once was lost, but now am found.”

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.