

16th Sunday After Pentecost Proper 19
September 12, 2010
the Rev. Ken Kroohs
(Exodus 32:71-4; Ps. 51:1-11; 1st Tim 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10)

WOW !!

St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, High Point, NC

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH ... AND THE MEDITATIONS OF ALL OUR
HEARTS ... BE ALWAYS ACCEPTABLE TO YOU --- OUR STRENGTH AND OUR
REDEEMER AMEN

I enjoy taking a few moments and stepping back from
Sunday's scriptures to try and look at them fresh, and
from another perspective.

Today's gospel is particularly difficult to do that
with since, very possibly, the most viewed Christian
painting comes from this Gospel. It seems as if every
Sunday School had at least one copy of the painting of
Jesus walking back with the one sheep over His
shoulders.

Of course in some ways that is the most inaccurate
painting you can find. Jesus almost certainly looked
more Palestinian than northern European! A blond, blue
eyed Jesus would have been as much a miracle as the
virgin birth. I suspect that if Jesus looked like most
of us that would have been so unusual it would have
been mentioned in scripture.

Another reflection focuses on the second story. The woman loses a very valuable item so she searches until she finds it. At that point she calls together her friends and celebrates. I laughed when I read that "fresh" because I realized I give God LOTS of reasons to celebrate! There are lots of times I have been lost so God got to celebrate all those times!!

A third reflection concerns where we fit in these stories. That is frequently a good question when Jesus tells one of His stories: "Where am I represented?" In the prodigal son story we might see ourselves in all the roles: the prodigal son, the older son who is angry at the prodigal son being welcomed, the father who welcomes the prodigal son home, and even the servants who are observing all this.

But in today's Gospel we have only one role. We are the sheep or the coin. God is the shepherd. God is the woman.

That said -- consider how sheep and the coin are treated. Consider that Jesus' point is about how valuable you are. How important you are. And how easy it is to wander away like the sheep.

If you have ever spent any time with sheep you know they are basically fairly stupid creatures whose only thought is about what is happening right now. Typically their heads are down and they are simply looking for what would make them happy. It is easy to imagine ... or observe a sheep wandering away from a place which is safe and has everything needed simply because they do not take a moment to look around.

Gee ... I wonder why Jesus uses "sheep" so often to illustrate us! How often do we just wander away from God because we don't take a few seconds to look around and consider how much God has for us? Its not intentional. Its not done because we think we will find something better. It is done because we don't think.

In a strange way that is a compliment to God. Like a child who is so comfortable and secure they can wander around knowing they are safe, we wander around knowing God will always take us back.

But even "wander" might suggest too much forethought. Try "drift" - we drift away from God. I have an image of being at the ocean and taking a float out beyond the breakers. Lying there, passively, we

might drift up the coast or down, toward the shore or further out. We are controlled by forces other than ourselves.

In fact we might be more like the coin than the sheep. The coin had no influence on where it ended up.

I frequently ask groups what influences their decisions. When I use specific examples, almost always the answers are within two groups: other people and advertising. Very seldom do I hear about a specific plan for a life - a purpose.

Oh, we might have a plan for our career, or how our house will look. But for the much more important questions about who we are? Less likely. If our job or our house are who we are - that is very sad.

One good question to bring to church each week might be something like: "What did I do this past week to move toward my goal? My purpose in life?"

The "scare them into heaven" preachers are totally wrong theologically - I am not sure they ever read the Gospels thoroughly, but as motivators they are good!

We tend to respond quickly to "do this OR ELSE!" messages.

Fortunately for us, God gives a very different message. Not only is God willing to take us back. God goes looking for us. The shepherd did not stand there waiting for the sheep to return. The woman did not go "oh well, I will see it eventually." They both went out seeking what was lost.

Remember these stories are told in response to the pharisees criticizing Jesus for spending time with sinners. To that criticism Jesus responds that God goes out seeking what was lost.

Of course that is the other reason we have trouble identifying with the sheep or the coin identifying with the lost. **We** have never done anything as bad as **those** people! We may have messed up a little from time to time but never that bad. Never so bad God would consider us 'LOST'.

Paul says we are all sinners, everyone of us. In our judgmental, mechanistic minds we set what we have done verses what others have done ... and decide we come out pretty good. We have never murdered anyone,

raped anyone, stolen anything - well maybe a pen from the office but that does not really count. So why would God call us 'lost'?

The fact is that Jesus spends very little time worrying about the "big 10 commandments". Jesus talks all the time about how we treat other people. And in that realm - we could do better. I know this - there are times I have disappointed God. I have disappointed myself and I know God's standards are higher than mine!

I know there are times I have caused grief, and then celebration when I was 'found' again.

Which brings me to the final reflection. I mentioned that we are the sheep. We are the coin. We are the reason God celebrates. We cause celebrations in heaven itself.

Think about that. Think about the fact that you are so valuable to, and so loved by the creator of the universe that God celebrates when you pay attention. That's what "returning" is about - paying attention to God. You are so loved that God celebrates when you pay attention.

You are the center of the universe for the creator of the universe. You are what matters to the savior of the world. You personally are what the Lord, the giver of life focuses on.

Wow.

We have previous sermons on our website. To read an earlier recent sermon just enter: www.st-christopher.org/sermon.html.

[CLICK HERE TO RESPOND](#): I would enjoy reading your comments about this sermon. Please feel free to discuss content or presentation. (If you wish to use another email system send your comments to: ken@st-christopher.com)