

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

15 Pentecost
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Fr. Bill McGinty

“Lost and Found!”

“Repent for the Kingdom of God is among you! Repent and believe in the Gospel!” Behind the front door of this church is a picture in a frame. It depicts Jesus, the Good Shepherd, rescuing a lamb that has fallen onto the ledge of a cliff while a bird of prey hovers overhead. That picture represents all that this Church of the Good Shepherd is about. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who comes looking for his lost sheep and keeps looking until he finds them and brings them home.

In today’s Gospel that parable of the lost sheep is a metaphor for the whole of Jesus’ life and ministry. God has sent his Son to rescue the poor, the wounded, and the sinner.

It is a metaphor that we all understand and it is one that we, here in this Church, feel comfortable with. We look at our great Good Shepherd window and we like this presentation of Jesus, the Lord. The Good Shepherd speaks of duty, faithfulness, mercy and compassion! When we ask ourselves the question, “Whom do we identify within the story?” we invariably put ourselves in the role of the lost sheep!

It is interesting to ponder why we do that. The vast majority of us have never committed any great sin. We don’t rob banks, kidnap millionaires, assassinate presidents, embezzle our companies, or any of the things that make for fast racy novels. At the most we might speed on Interstate 84, lie to the wife that you have work to do, when she wants you to go to the Grand Union, or be rude to a telemarketer who interrupts dinner. And as we get older, breaking the Ten Commandments looks less attractive anyway. If you miss church, your mother-in-law decides to arrive and you are stuck with her all day. You dare not take the Lord’s name in vain, because you’re too old and you can’t set a bad example to the grandkids, “You said a bad word!” If you lie, your wife knows it, before the words left your lips! The same way she knows how many cans of beer were in the refrigerator when she went to bed early. You can’t even covet your neighbor’s wife, because she drives a Mustang and moves so fast it hurts your old eyes, steams your glasses, and makes your head spin! So basically, what else can you be, but good!?

But, there is another way to think of this Gospel passage. There is another way to reflect on this Parable. What if Jesus doesn’t want us to think of ourselves as the Lost Sheep? What if he really wants us to think of ourselves as the “Good Shepherd” and this parable changes its entire dynamic. It changes its dynamic because being the Lost Sheep was a passive role. We didn’t have to do anything. Jesus did it all. He noticed we were lost, he left the others and he searched until he found us. But once we think about what the story is telling us, we know we are called to be the Good Shepherd, and we have to do something, and we have to act. We have to set out to help, to rescue and to bring home, the lost, the sinner, the unhappy, the sick, the rejected and sometimes the crook and the prisoner, too! Change who we are in the story and we create an imperative; “to follow Jesus’ teaching

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you must do this, you must do what Jesus would do, you must be the writer of the Gospel, and bring God's saving Kingdom to others. We have a lot of people who do that in this Church.

We have people who reach deep into their pockets and financially support our ministries, to children, the poor and the needy month after month. They are Good Shepherds. We have people who work with children day after day, picking them up when they fall, dusting them down, listening to broken dreams and broken hearts, they are our Good Shepherds.

We have Shepherds who serve the rest of us. Always there, preparing Altars, funerals, weddings at everyone's call, and we have lonely figures who leave the house, to travel miles, bringing the Eucharist, a smile, a chat and much cheer to sick and shut-ins alike. Are they Good Shepherds? Very much so! And we have a dynamic ministry to prisoners at Pike County jail. Are they Lost Sheep? Probably. Is our prison ministry team Good Shepherds? Most definitely!

Have you ever been lost? I mean, have you ever been really lost? Not lost in the Mall or lost at Disney World or a Fair. Have you ever been truly lost? I was only lost once. I believe it was 1971. I had gone to France with a college friend. We were trying to hitch hike to Brittany. I turned around and he had jumped into a car and he was gone. I spent two days lost in France, till on the 25th of December I arrived in the City of Dinan. It was 6:00 pm in the evening, and there were no trains or buses to where I wanted to go. I started to walk the last thirty miles of my journey; it was dark and wet with few cars on the road. After three hours I found myself walking through a forest. I thought I heard wolves howling in the distance. I had long since given up on trying to wave down a car. On a straight piece of road I saw a car coming my way. I gave it one last wave. It stopped some fifty yards ahead and I ran towards it. Out of the car stepped a tall man dressed in black with a hat and a heavy moustache. He put my bag in the trunk. He spoke no English. We had a difficult conversation. I asked him where he was going and what his profession was. To my relief he told me he was a Policeman, a Detective and he was heading for the Port of Brest in Brittany to investigate a murder. I was relieved. He dropped me at a Café, 5 miles from my destination, and the Cafe owner drove me to the College I was heading for. It was almost 12:00 midnight. Christmas was almost over. Wet, dirty, hungry I struggled through the door to be met by dozens of students celebrating Christmas. I never wanted to be lost again. I had been three days on the road, in a strange country; I had felt abandoned, fear and hopelessness all at the same time. The bright lights of the College, the warm glow of the log fire, the hot meal, gave me a sense of rescue, but I never ever forgot being lost and how it felt.

In our lives we are pretty lucky. No matter how bad the winter storm, when we pull into the driveway, when we walk through the door of our own home, we feel safe and secure. It's hard then to think there are people who live in doorways and under bridges in our cities. But you all know that there are worse kinds of homelessness. There are people, who one way or another, have ruined their own lives. Chains and bars are not just something

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you find in prisons. Bad habits, greed, selfishness can make man a prisoner of his own sinfulness. Whether it is drugs or alcohol, violence or money, a person can lose their way.

And when sin steps in to take the place where God and love once dwell, then love, forgiveness, friendship, family, and relationships step out. Who has had a son or daughter who has wandered away and broken the ties that bind parent to child?

“Who can separate us from the love of God?” Paul asks! Sin can. Sin can cast darkness over people’s lives that will find them lost, to any forgiveness and to any good.

And we may be tempted to cut the line between us and them be they a stranger or a son or daughter, till we hear Jesus’ words “NO! NO! You must go after the one that is lost”. “You must become the Shepherd!” If not who? Who will tend my sheep? Who will bring back the sinner? Who will go out into the night and find the lost?

In the short time I have been here I have noticed that this Church draws people. Some come to look at our stonework or come inside to admire our windows. But others knock on the door with a tale to tell! Sometimes lost, sometimes abandoned, sometimes hurt. Maybe it is the "Good Shepherd" name that attracts them. We try not to turn them away. This should be that Inn on the Road to Emmaus, where Jesus broke bread with friends. Or that little house of Mary and Martha at Bethany where Jesus found rest, whichever, here the desperate, the lost, the lonely should be able to find some comfort. And that should turn us all into a Church of Good Shepherds. Perhaps it’s our greatest role as followers of the Gospel.

Throughout the Gospel Jesus teaches his disciples “Feed my lambs, feed my sheep” He prepares his followers for the day when he is no longer with them. If his Kingdom is to succeed then it is his followers who must follow where he leads and do the things that he does.

Jesus came to save the sinner and to recover God’s lost children. “From this day on” Jesus tells, Peter. “You will become a fisher of men.” This is not a suggestion, it is a must do command. This is what it means to be Christian. It is to change our world and to bring about God’s world. As Church, as a Parish, as a part of God’s Kingdom, we are in the salvation business. We are that refuge, that haven, an Oasis in the desert of people’s lives. Step through these doors and you should find peace, find harmony and find your God.

Let us pray.

God our Father, we seek to build your Kingdom amid the chaos and turmoil of our world. We follow your Son’s command to seek and find the lost and the friendless. We pray that you send us the light of your Spirit, so that we may serve as a beacon to those seeking your help. We ask you to bless your Church. Bless this Church with the grace and the power of your Spirit that we may be a refuge in the storm, a place of tranquility in troubled lives, a safe haven where all may find your love and peace. Amen +

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