

The Good Shepherd

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Preacher: Rev. Josh Ruiter

[0 : 00] It's good to be here with you guys tonight. It's been such a blessing to serve at Advent in a fellow's role, and I'm really, really excited to talk about this parable tonight. One of the things that Tommy said to me as he was sort of prepping me tonight to speak was he said, remember one thing, if nothing else, that God loves these people, and so do you. And that's a profound statement, both from Tommy but also in this story that Jesus is trying to get across, that Jesus' love is so deep and so wide that it's meant for everyone, and there's not a person in this room who can't receive that. So saying that, let's open with a quote from English priest C.F. Andrews, who served as a missionary in India for most of his life, and it says this, Christ seeks from us deeds, not words.

Devotion to him is in the first place not sentimental, but practical. If the Christian faith has no power to restore or recreate the human will, leading one to deeds of unselfish service, then it stands self-condemned.

Well, after saying to you that Jesus loves you and then saying that if we're not doing anything about it, the faith stands self-condemned, I think we need to look into it a little bit more together and talk about it. So tonight as we wrap up the parable series, I want to really dive into the idea that throughout Jesus' ministry, and specifically here, what he's doing is he's reorienting the way that people look at faith. He's reorienting the way people approach the relationship with God, with any God, but specifically with the one true God, his Father and our Father.

He's reorienting the way that our lives should be lived. He's reorienting the way that we should see our very selves. No longer is it an inward faith. No longer can it be about ourselves, or how good the sacrifice we bring to the table, but it becomes about the kingdom, and about God's glory, and it becomes outward-facing, and missional in its essence.

This has never been more real and more necessary for the church than it is today, for a long time. The church in our culture has been sort of a center point of culture. It's often community centers.

[2 : 26] It's often been the place of gathering. For many, many years, the church, as you all know, the church is a place where truth came from, and culture accepted what the church said as truth.

But we find ourselves in a time where the church is no longer a city center, and biblical truth is no longer truth. In fact, truth is not truth at all, and anything that's relative may be truth or may not be truth, and we could have a discussion philosophically about that at a different point. I won't probably be a part of it, but feel free.

So tonight, let me propose two questions for us to ponder as we walk through this parable. The first is this. Would you rather be a part of a community, cared for, loved, and defended, or would you rather be alone, unaware of the dangers around you, without protection, and defenseless?

And secondly, if you could choose for every person you've ever met, what would your choice for them be in that first question? You see, this is what Jesus is laying out for the people that he's talking to in this parable.

It's what he wants us to understand and dwell with tonight. And he answers them as well, and the answer comes in the form of a call and an offer, and we'll get back to that at the end.

[3 : 44] So tonight, we're going to do a little bit of a heart inspection on ourselves and on the church. We're going to look deeper to understand what this offer and call might look like for us, both as individuals and as a community.

And we're going to do so by looking at the heart of the Pharisees and the heart of the shepherd in this story. Let's pray. Heavenly Father God, we thank you so much for loving us.

We thank you so much for the grace you've given to us, for the gift you've given us. God, as we walk through this story, let us see and receive the offer and answer the call. God, be with us tonight.

Let your spirit fill this place, open our hearts and minds to you. In your name we pray. Amen. All right, so we'll kick off with a very, very short summary of what Jesus is dealing with here in his audience, and then we'll take a look at both the heart of the Pharisees and the heart of the shepherd.

So Jesus here, he's, in this context, he's speaking to sort of two parties here. He's speaking both to the sinners, the lost, the broken. He's also speaking to the Pharisees and the Israelites and those who are sort of steeped in God tradition.

[4 : 54] The believers, if I can put it that way. And what's going on here is those believers, the Pharisees, the ones who claimed God, were extremely hostile towards Jesus and his ministry.

They're hostile towards his lifestyle, spending time and dining with, you know, with the destitute, with thieves, with harlots, with tax collectors. Really, they were upset that Jesus decided to spend most of his time with the most despicable people of their culture.

And just before this, what really got them riled up in chapter 14, if we were to go back, is Jesus says, understand this, God is giving the kingdom to the outcasts of society.

Those of you who have it in a row, this is Jesus speaking to the Pharisees, who have all your ducks lined up, you need to be careful. You need to listen. And so Jesus uses this parable to appeal to the common sense of both sides of the crowd and to show the reality of this ministry that he's come to bring and start and grow.

And he does it both in the face of those who despise what he's doing and for those who, for the first time in their lives, have been invited in to a worship of the real God.

[6 : 08] The analogy of a shepherd that's used in this story is not a new one to them. It was well understood by both sides, the Pharisees and the sinners. They would have understood the shepherd and his role to be a selfless, humble, and extremely difficult life calling.

One that involves much self-sacrifice. And in all honesty and analogy, that was drastically, drastically different than the legalistic and moralistic elitism that the Pharisees and religious leaders had come to portray faith to be.

For us, maybe a shepherd doesn't work so well. I don't know if any of you tend sheep. I've sheared a sheep in my life, and I come from the Midwest, so I don't expect any of you to have done the same.

And if you have, God bless you even more. But so maybe for us it would be more prudent to talk about it as a teacher and her students. Think about it like an elementary teacher and her class going on a field trip, going to the zoo, perhaps.

And on this field trip they go and they have a good time, and they're all at the zoo together. And when it comes time to leave, the students come back to the bus. But there's one student missing.

[7 : 22] Now what Jesus says in this parable is the teacher is going to put the students on the bus and go back and find the student, to which all of us should rightly say, exactly.

Right. It makes sense. That's exactly what the people here are saying. Okay. Where are you going with this, Jesus? This makes perfect sense. But we know you're taking it somewhere, and so he did. Maybe a better way of putting it yet is in the words of Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, who says this, the church is the only society in the world that exists for the benefit of those who are not yet its members.

And so we must then tonight look at the heart of the Pharisees, and then after that look at the heart of the shepherd. So let's start with the heart of the Pharisees then. The heart of the Pharisees was very much a self-centered heart.

For them, God was inward. He was a secret. He was something that they sort of controlled and manipulated. Throughout their history, they had sort of bargained with God and thought that they sort of had him under control and had him figured out.

They should have seen by that point that it didn't work, because when they tried that, they ended up serving other nations and kings and rulers. They ended up as slaves and in not good situations.

[8 : 37] But they didn't learn. They still had this mindset. And there was an exclusivity to go with that. There was this self-centered heart bred individualism, and it bred ownership.

See, in the story, the sheep belonged to the shepherd, but what had happened in the audience Jesus was talking to is the religious leaders and the Israelites had deemed themselves the shepherd.

They'd sort of tried to misplace God and take the role and become the headship and choose who got to have their God rather than God getting to say who gets to have him.

And this doesn't work. It doesn't work for a variety of reasons. The main reason it doesn't work is because it leads to a fortification, a heart of fortification, sort of a protect-this-house mentality. Right? But we all know that when things on the inside aren't good, the walls crumble from the outside inward.

When things get to the point that you have to protect what's inside rather than going outward and building, things aren't good. In the business world, when you have to start cutting out your own business and costs and expenses rather than being able to use money to grow your business, the situation's not good.

[9 : 56] But yet this is the track they chose to take as a protect-this-house mentality. It may not be unlike some of your children or unlike my childhood at Christmastime. When I was eight, I received an electric race car track.

I don't know if you guys remember these. These were big when I was a child. I didn't get one the first year without, and I was devastated about it. I was convinced Santa was dead. I came to believe that he's just a year late.

Because when I turned eight and got to Christmas that next year, lo and behold, I got my electric race car track. You see, the thing about these race car tracks is there were two lanes and there was two controllers, and they were meant to be played with someone.

But I didn't want to. I wanted to run both controllers. I didn't care about racing, winning, or losing. It was my race car track, and therefore I was going to play with it.

So though my little brother wanted to play and my dad demanded that he play, I refused. I said, no. If he's going to play, I'm not going to play. And my dad said, that's fine.

[10 : 59] Then don't play. And that's sort of what Jesus is saying here. All right? You both can play, and if you choose not to, that's fine. But they're going to get to play. But you see, what happened is I proceeded to play, and shortly thereafter I realized how much fun I was missing out on.

Because the real joy in having a two-lane race car track as an eight-year-old child is destroying your five-year-old brother in a race. Right? Because he wasn't nearly as coordinated as I was at that point.

If we were to do it again today, he'd probably beat me. But we don't have the track anymore, so I can still claim victory. All right.

The other thing that you get out of a self-centered heart in the example of the Pharisees is this elitism I referenced. See, they think they're better. They think they're better and therefore more deserving.

And because they're more deserving, then they're more loved by God. If we were to sit here and just make that statement, it's easy to sit in our seats or stand up here even and say, well, that's backwards.

[12 : 05] Obviously, no one is more loved by God. But you see, Jesus never leaves at surface level. He always takes a little bit deeper. So I want us to take just a moment and take it a little bit deeper.

This heart of elitism, before you judge the Pharisees and the Israelites of the day too harshly, think about our own lives for a second. How often do we compare?

Compare ourselves to other people. Other people in our field of vocation. Other parents, maybe, and how they raise their children. Other churches, and how they operate.

Other neighborhoods, other cities. Right? Whatever it is, our lives and our culture is built around comparisons. And when we buy into comparisons, what we've immediately done is established a level of elitism.

The very thing Jesus said doesn't work in my kingdom. So before we judge them, let's make sure that comparison is something that we try to avoid.

[13 : 13] And the last thing here in the heart of the Pharisees is Jesus is opening them up to a heart check. The same way he's opening us up tonight. He says very clearly in the passage, you all are sheep.

Right? He separates the 99 from the one. Right? The group, the large community, and the lost. But none of them are elephants.

None of them are lions or bears. What you have here is a group of sheep. Some are together and some aren't there yet, but we're all sheep. And so that means that we're all completely broken. We all have the same level of brokenness, but we're all open to the same availability of complete and total grace. And Jesus is telling them that their faith is that duty of a shepherd's that as a community to carry on the role of shepherd.

But as individuals to never forget that we're mere sheep. The heart of a shepherd then. How does this contrast or look different than the Pharisee's heart?

[14:19] It's a selfless heart instead of a self-centered heart. First and foremost, in this parable, Jesus is telling them and telling us God cares about the lost.

Now before we go any further, I want you to take notice that he offers a token of comfort here that we might miss. And let's pause for a bit of good exegesis as well, just briefly.

All right, it's easy to read this passage and to see this leaving of the 99 in the open country as it says and go after the one that is lost until he finds it.

Now upon just reading this, if you're like me and you read it and you think 99, open country, that's not very much care. Right?

But in fact, it's total care of the 99 that he shows in that statement because you see in the translation from the Greek and the words that Jesus spoke and what he meant, the word open country actually means a safe, sort of solitued pasture up on the mountainside.

[15:31] They didn't have fences all over the place. Shepherds traveled. They journeyed where the grass grew. And so for Jesus to make a point of stating that the 99 were in the open country is essentially for him to say they were safe and then the shepherd turned immediately.

So the focus is without hesitation the shepherd's instantaneous pursuit of the lost sheep but I don't want you to miss that he also puts the 99 in safe place.

Alright. So what does it mean then to say that God cares about the lost? It means a couple of things, alright? It means that God seeks after the lost. He seeks after the lost and this seeking after the lost happens in three ways, three primary ways.

First, it's an active search. The shepherd actively seeks. He doesn't turn over this obligation to a ranch hand or a hired hand or a college kid who had a few free hours at the end of the day.

Right? He didn't wait until the next morning and go out with a group of buddies to go on a search.

He dropped what he was doing. He didn't delegate the role and he went all out.

[16:52] A hundred percent he went all out for this one sheep. He invests his time and risks his life for the lost. We can see that no clearer than on the cross.

not far down the line in Luke where the search for the lost ends with his death on the cross for you and for me.

Secondly, it's an incessant search. You see, in the text we see that the shepherd doesn't quit seeking. He doesn't search and then break for coffee. Right? My grandfather's a farmer.

I'm familiar with farm culture and farm time and it goes a little something like this. 8 a.m. breakfast, 10 a.m. coffee, 12 p.m. lunch, 2 p.m. coffee, 4 p.m. coffee, 5 p.m. go home.

Right? That's farm schedule. However, the shepherd here throws out his own agenda, his own coffee, his own lunch. He throws out his own sleep cycle, in fact.

[17:56] And he goes without stopping until he arrives at the sheep. His needs fall after the needs of the sheep.

His care for self comes second to the care for his flock. You see, Jesus is teaching in this moment that no person, no harlot, no thief, no tax collector, no religious elite, no Israelite, no Gentile, no one, no level of brokenness could ever keep the shepherd from seeking for you.

You're never, ever too far away for the love of Jesus to get to you. And thirdly, it's a burdensome search. We see at the end of this search in Luke 15, in this story, that the shepherd doesn't only find the sheep, he proceeds to pick up the sheep and carry him back.

I raise dogs, have all my life, love it, but I tell you what, when a dog runs off and I have to go seeking the dog, I do so actively, I do so incessantly, but I promise you I don't bear the burden of the dog at the end of the search.

That dog is going to march its happy hind end back to the kennel alongside of me, not on my shoulders. Because I'm not Jesus. But you see, Jesus says that he carries the lost sheep back.

[19:26] He doesn't rebuke it for wandering, there's no scolding that we see here. Rather, he picks it up and acts in a labor of love. More selfless love. He provides rest to the sheep at his own

expense.

Let me tell you a story real quick about my brother Zach. He came with our youth group, he lives in California, he's planting a church in the San Diego area right now. God bless him.

But he came to Alaska with the youth group that I lead this summer. And what happened on one of the very first days is one of the kids on the way down a mountain tripped and fell and broke their toe.

Well, you see, on the way down the mountain, how far down is the question and how far to go is the problem. It happened at the peak. And so he needed help getting all the way back down the mountain.

My brother, without saying a word, picked his kid up and put him on his shoulders and hiked him down a mountain. 37% incline. Didn't put him down the whole time.

[20 : 31] Didn't say a word. Didn't complain once all trip. By day four of the trip, we went on another hike and my brother had to walk down and up both sides of the hike backwards because his knees gave out every step he took forwards.

He didn't complain once. He did it with a smile on his face because God has given my brother this capacity to love like Jesus and to love selflessly.

The same love, the same shepherding gift that God calls us, his church, to emulate. And this all happens and is first exemplified by Jesus.

Like I said a while ago, what he did at the cross, as we'll say in a little while, for you and for many, was a gift that comes only from a selfless heart, a shepherd's heart.

And then God rejoices in the finding and redemption of the lost. This is the most spectacular part of the story to me. The most beautiful part of Jesus and our faith is that not only does he seek and find, he then rejoices.

[21 : 44] See, he didn't get back and then go take a nap or sleep and then rejoice. He didn't plan a party for some time down the road. As he was coming back up the hill, he says it's time to have a party because the sheep is back.

Right? He doesn't break because it's more important to him that they celebrate than anything else in the world. Rejoicing is what God calls his friends and neighbors to in the finding of the lost sheep. Much alike one of our first and foremost callings as the church ought to be rejoicing. Rejoicing the moment and every moment an unbeliever claims Jesus.

There's no greater joy for the shepherd than the return of the lost sheep. And he gives everything everything of himself and his flock and finds his ultimate joy in the finding.

I want to step aside from the story for a second to talk about our church and to talk about core groups and the vision of core groups briefly. The O in core group talks about outward facing being outward facing communities.

[23 : 00] What a beautiful vision. Right? The question then is how many of our core groups have made this a priority and part of the essence of the very group itself?

is your group focused on being a family for the lonely the lost for the abandoned in your neighborhood? It's a journey.

If you're sitting there right now saying no it feels a little bit more like a pharisaical click don't worry. The journey means that growth happens starting right there.

If you're sitting there saying yeah our group's really good at that wonderful share with us how you do it so we can all learn better. The easy tendency in this is to love each other and fortify ourselves. The struggle really is to build relationships instead of fences. Right? How many fences do you see or gates in D.C.? Well one around nearly every government building.

[24 : 04] Right? One around most walls. We live in a culture of fences and Christ calls us to take down fences and instead build relationships. To those here tonight without a core group or maybe this is your first time here at Advent how beautiful does it sound to know that you have a family right here in this room and in your community no matter where you have been or are because we love you we love you deeply because Jesus loves you deeply.

So all in all where does this leave us? I started by saying this parable is an offer and a call and so that's where we'll return. How is it an offer then?

It's an offer to those who are lost right now wandering through life scared good news the shepherd's on his way and he's not taking a break until he gets to you.

Right? We don't have the capacity to pursue God. We can't we can't do it on our own. We can't make the choice to chase after him. He has to make the choice to pursue us and thank God he did. But you see in this pursuit in this finding there is a little bit that we have a role we have to play in this and that role we can find in verse 7 it says just so I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

[25 : 45] So what's our role in this what's our role in this pursuit and in this rescue? It's that of repentance. What does repentance look like? Jesus tells us that too in the parable.

He says it's letting yourself be carried by the shepherd. He says it's owning your lostness by accepting that carry and by allowing Jesus to put you on his shoulders and take us back into the Father's loving arms.

That is repentance allowing God to give you grace. let me ask you this where in your lives do you need repentance today?

For me it's happened incredibly intensely the last month month and a half. I told you I grew up in Iowa Iowa's slow and I love it for that.

I moved to Jamaica Jamaica's slower. I love it even more for that. And then I moved to D.C. And the word slow doesn't exist in the vocabulary of the District of Columbia.

[27 : 00] You see what had happened to me is I had completely bought into the power of productivity. I had completely bought into the lie that the busier you are and the more you can get done the more accomplished your career and the better a person you are.

And you see I felt pretty good because almost all of my time is spent in the church in some capacity. But the deception in that is the power of productivity doesn't escape the church either and it doesn't escape Christians.

You see what God called me to painfully and it's still painful but I'm in his arms now is to rediscover Sabbath and to orient my life around Sabbath and resting in his arms to be willing to stop and say God you are enough and he's driven me to that.

So think about where God is calling you to rest in his arms today because I tell you what there's nothing better in the world there's no greater comfort or joy than resting in the Father's arms completely and totally.

And secondly and lastly then it's a call. If it's an offer for those who are searching those who are lost those who are hopeless it's a call to the church. It's a call to Christ's body.

[28 : 22] The New Testament calls us Christ's body for a reason because we're to emulate the heart of the shepherd. It's a call one because the shepherd has rescued us from our lostness. I could speak on this for hours but I think it's better to go to the source one of the most brilliant sources that you'll ever read St. Paul and in 1st Timothy he says this Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst.

Church never forget that we were all lost before we were found. Know from know where you came from to know where you're going right where you're going in Christ Jesus.

Two make your lives missional and outward. That's the call. It's a risky business being a Christian. It's never been promised to be easy. Right? We can look all over the world today and see the terrible things that are happening to our brothers and sisters across the world.

We can look back in history and see equally as terrifying and terrible of things. But there's also terrifying and terrible things happening in our culture and they're even harder sometimes to deal with because they're masked.

They're masked. They're not blatant. So you need to make your lives missional and outward. We all need to do that. Christ makes this claim as he calls us to pick up our cross daily and follow him.

[29 : 49] Whether that's through offering yourself to DC 127 in some capacity. Whether that's to your co-workers being a selfless worker. or to your neighbors in your community through your core group in your household.

The call is this to be a place and a people of rest for a tired, lost, and lonely world. And because he is so brilliant let's use Dietrich Bonhoeffer to close this out tonight with a quote from The Cost of Discipleship.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again. The gift which must be asked for. The door at which a man must knock.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow. And it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life.

And it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin. And grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all it is costly because it cost God the life of his son. [31 : 01] Ye were bought at a price and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all it is grace because God did not reckon his son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us.

Costly grace is the incarnation of God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father God grace is costly and it's beautiful.

No greater joy no deeper hope can be found than in your salvation than in the shepherd's loving arms setting at the seat and the feet of the Father.

God I ask for all of us in this room and those who aren't here tonight that we can receive both the offer and the call of you the good shepherd our Lord Jesus Christ and ask that our response can be one of repentance and joy.

In your name we pray. Amen.