

Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.”

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The pharisees and scribes grumble, for the Son of Man welcomes sinners and tax collectors.

These are both turns of phrases, euphemisms, as we say.

For a sinner is a prostitute. A tax collector is a traitor. For only she who makes a life out of fulfilling men’s vices is a life-long sinner, so they thought; and only he who steals from his own people for a foreign power, that is the Roman Empire, is a traitor.

So the righteous pharisees and scribes grumble. How can a good man invite such bad people.

We say that bad company spoils good character. How much more does evil and treacherous company spoil the character of the mad.

And mad is how they must have seen Him, the Christ, for mad, insane, is how He describes God.

‘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. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’

And again:

‘Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a

lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

I doubt few rational men would count a one percent loss in their livestock something to abandon the ninety-nine remaining for. [Such would fall under acceptable losses]. Nor does one search day and night for a single coin. Much less does one host a great party after finding the single sheep or the single coin, a party likely costing more than what was found and celebrated.

But the Almighty Lord is not starting a business. He is not turning a profit. Rather, He is *drawing all men unto himself*.

The madness of men is the sanity of God, and what seems the madness of God brings sanity to men.

For only God values what He has created for its own sake, and not for what it can give Him. For this reason, He seeks after the lost sheep, not because of its great value on the market, but because of its great value to Him. And the Church ever sweeps its house looking for the lost coin, not because the coin wins a great prize, but because there is no greater prize than to find him [the coin] who is lost.

Do you not know that a prostitute and a traitor too are made in the image of God? So much more their sin, so much more their glorification.

You who sin, and say to yourselves 'can God really love one as me? Can He save a sinner like me?' You say things that are sane to men, but madness to God, but God has the last say, for after all, we men are but passing things, but God 'is who is.' [We see in ourselves only the value society confers on us; God knows in us His own image; the imprint of His empire.]

We, *who are evil*, seek after what gives us gain, friends in high places, friends in low but useful places, new opportunities, new ventures, new pleasures. It is not rare to be told by this world as honest advice to forsake friends because they are toxic. The Lord seeks out the toxic to make them friends, for He will *draw all men unto himself*.

I speak of the Lord, the Almighty God, who *spared not His own Son*, but brought

Him to bleed upon a cross, that even the whore and the betrayer would be forgiven and spend forever with Him; and not only them, but the Pharisee and scribe, for are they not too made in His image? These, too, He also seeks out, as lost sheep among a hundred; as a silver coin, alone lost among many. They are not exceptions just because they seem more righteous. Indeed, a feast is being prepared for them as well, just as they are being found.

The unrighteous and the righteous together shall feast; even as the *lion shall lay down with the lamb*. For all who will be found by the Son will be forgiven by the Son.

Do you think yourself beyond the lot of those that can be forgiven? Do you think yourself so far off that you cannot be found? You think of yourself far too much. For it is the Son that is searching, and He has not yet given up His quest.

What drives the Son to search so endlessly for those who are lost in sin and iniquity? What is the madness of the divine mind?

The prophet tells us, the sole and only driving purpose of the Lord, the lone and solitary mission of His mind:

'And I, the Lord, will be their God.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Ezekiel 33:7-9; Romans 13:1-10; Matthew 18:1-20.