**“One Shepherd”**

Psalm 119:169-176

Ezekiel 34:11-24

1 Timothy 1:(3-11) 12-17

Luke 15:1-10

 Pentecost 14, Sept. 10-11, 2022

From Paul to his teacher Timothy, chapter 1, and not just the concluding verses printed in our bulletin insert, but those led up to starting at verses 3 onward: “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

“Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

“I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

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

**Bridge**

For the beginning of Faith’s **school year this weekend**, it’s appropriate that we have these texts to hear, and God entrusts through the Ezekiel and Paul and Jesus Himself and then Paul with the teaching and learning task. We need to recognize and acknowledge to subject of all the matters, the One Shepherd who is Jesus, both God’s and David’s Son and Prince. **He** must be all-of-our-places proclaimed as the One who’s always capturing and recapturing challenged and even lost sheep. He is the One who celebrates always keeping and bringing each and every one of us home.

**Text**

Preaching and Sunday School and Bible classes and Confirmation and every ounce of care and teaching (and learning) at home must be **faithful to the truth of the One Shepherd, Jesus, in content and Person**. Clearly (from Paul’s 1st letter to a teacher, Timothy) that’s not been always the case. I struggle to move beyond that dilemma before including the fact of it in our hearing. Paul said that he **had been** a “blasphemer and persecutor and insolent opponent” of that Shepherd, so wanted to scare all away from the risk of any semblance of teaching or falling for such ugliness and ungodliness. He makes clear to Timothy and all who’d teach and/or learn that we all should **know the difference between the correct and the false** and **stay-focused (be-focused) upon what’s given as accurate**, **running from things counter to the truth that’s in Christ Jesus** and **teach and learn and be of** **Him**, **instilling** **Him** and **protecting and keeping from things that are not of Him and truth**.

Andthe prophet **Ezekiel** agrees, as do all texts. God recorded (through Ezekiel**) a need for “rescue from places where those who should know better get scattered” … where “clouds and thick darkness” hide dangers and distance**. “Lost”, even, are those called who are scattered where they should not be. The language there does not even soften to a simpler straying-off or distance but a “lostness” and who must be found and, then, captured or re-captured to be taken to “good pasture in grazing ground and country.

And even friends are named as **distractors that scatters**. “I will judge between, even, **sheep and sheep / rams and male goats**, **some** treading down with their feet pasture land and muddying the water meant for drink, pushing aside others, preying on others”, and that’s with false thoughts that Paul refers to, trying to be persuasive in directions outside of what’s God-pleasing and lying counter to truth, deceiving with, even, a face that seems friendly yet is really **not**, but (rather) **corrupt** **(as in wolves in the clothing of a sheep)**.

“**Sound doctrine**” is to be taught and learned. The “lawless and disobedient (the ungodly and unrepentant sinners / unholy and profane)” as Paul warns the “just” against are (and I simply recite his short list): “those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and all else that’s contrary to sound doctrine”. Timothy (and we who would, both, teach and learn, or parent and do the same) are “charged, or entrusted” with a, quote, “good warfare over these types of perversions, holding faith and a good conscience, rejecting any of what could be of any” of those named sorts, keeping from (as Paul called it) “making a shipwreck of their faith”. Even named, by Paul, are those making “confident, but wrong, assertions”. I **commend all in this congregation of Christians to compare themselves to “sound doctrine”**, and **not to the, quote, “vain discussions of different doctrines and myths”**. The fact is that **both exists and must be discerned as different** (one “pure and of a sincere / honest faith” and others just bad “speculations” and “wanderings from Christ Jesus and truth”, “swervings away” and (as the Lord Himself will clarify) “lost”, in need of being **“found and returned” / repentant**.

**Application**

There is, however, **wonderful news for the “lost”**. Jesus, Himself, **searches for them to return them**. “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, rejoice. 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’**.” Well, **JESUS is THAT “MAN”**.

**He is the Man** who reached into the uncertainty of just a mortal birth and gave to each one of us baptized immortality by linking us to Himself. **He’s the Man** who placed each of us from a baptismal font up onto His own shoulders, making us look to the Heavenly Father so similar to His own Son that we’re unnoticeably distinct from Him (not really distinct, at all, from Jesus). He’s the Man who surrounds us with other sheep also carried by Him. We know ourselves as community because we community. No other community has that connection. And not best of all, but where the best of all will be most noticed, **He’s the Man** to carry us into Paradise. When all else created looks, maybe, least reliable, His arms and shoulders will take us through the transition of Heaven hinted at to Heaven given.

**Then** … and not only then, but maybe **especially then** **at the victory of a salvation held until the glory of Heaven** … that’s when the party begins. **“Rejoice with Me”**, Jesus will announce to all the realm of Heaven. **“Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep all the way until glory. And there will be joy in Heaven over every one repentant sinner who gains glory captured and carried there by the Savior.”**

In +Jesus’ name. Amen.