

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (Kick-Off Sunday)
September 10-11, 2016
Luke 15:1-10

“On a Mission”

Do you remember where you were on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001? It is one of those days etched into our collective memory. Fifteen years have gone by since the terrorist attacks of that day which forever changed life as we know it here in our own nation, and to a great degree life around the world. We are not the same. Some would rather not remember what happened on this day; others can't forget. I vividly recall sitting in the church office that morning when we found out about the attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the attack on the Pentagon here in our own backyard, and the foiled attack which led to the downing of the airplane outside Shanksville, PA. The father of one of our church office staff at that time worked at the Pentagon, as did a parent of one of the children in our Early Childhood Education Center. The families of these people, like so many others, were frantic with worry because cell phone lines were overloaded and calls could not go through. We learned how vulnerable our communications were, and possibly still may be, at such a time. I recall sitting and praying with these individuals in the midst of anxious concern and tears. It was a very hard time as we sought strength and hope in the Lord Jesus. Thankfully, each of these individuals was reunited with their loved ones, but as we know, for many, this was not the case. The attacks killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others and caused at least \$10 billion in property and infrastructure damage and \$3 trillion in total costs (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks). The images that we saw from this day are burned into minds. Today we remember not only what was lost on that day fifteen years ago, but we also remember what was found in our life together: enduring concern for those in need, resolve and resiliency in the face of disaster, a commitment to battle terrorism and root out its seeds wherever these may be found. Remembering this day of suffering and anguish also brings to mind stories of profound courage and compassion. First responders – fire fighters, police, paramedics – but also common, ordinary citizens risked their very lives, and in some cases, gave their very lives, to help and assist others to safety. Perhaps without even realizing it, these people found themselves on a mission. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus tells us what it means to be on a mission in two short parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. That becomes the theme for preaching on this day: “On a Mission.” May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

Today's Gospel lesson from Luke 15 contains the first two of three parables that Jesus told of being on a mission; of what it means to be lost and then found. The parable of Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7) is followed by the parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10), which is followed by the familiar parable of the Lost Sons, often referred to as the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). We heard about the lost sons back in the Lenten season (3-6-2016), but those first two parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin we hear about today. And how appropriate that this is the text before us today on Kick-Off Sunday as we begin a new year of learning and growing in Christ! The Lord Jesus who came on a divinely-appointed mission from the Father to save and redeem us, now calls us to go in his Name on a divinely-appointed mission to bring the good news of life and salvation in him to all people. This is at the heart of what we do here in this congregation, as our congregational vision puts it: **“We gather around the cross, formed and fueled by God's grace, and are sent into the world to invite all people to a life transformed by Jesus Christ.”** As we come together in Jesus' Name, we do indeed gather around his cross. We are formed and fueled in worship, learning, and fellowship by the power of God's grace in Christ that comes to us in Word and Sacrament. But wait! There's more! The purpose behind this gathering, this forming, this fueling is so that we can then go out on a mission – Jesus' mission! Redeemed by Jesus and set free from the power of sin by his cleansing blood, we have a message to share with the world. Jesus would use each one of us to be his hands, his feet, his mouth to show and tell others how much they are loved by this

same Jesus. This is the mission to which we are called by the Lord Jesus. It is his mission, and he invites us to join him on it in daily life.

Having grown up on a farm, I can understand the sense of urgency that the shepherd felt about that one missing member of his flock. If one is missing somewhere out there in the pasture or field, you can just wait around hoping that somehow it'll find its way back home again. Not likely! You have to get up, go out there, and search for it, no matter how inconvenient this may be and regardless of what the weather may be like. It could be a matter of life and death for that missing animal. The same holds true with the woman who couldn't find one of her silver coins. It's likely that Jesus is referring here to special coins that women of his day would hold onto because they were part of their dowry and sewn onto their wedding veil or headdress. These were not coins that you'd use in ordinary transactions of daily life. They had both monetary as well as sentimental value. As with that missing sheep, the woman could not rest until this matter was resolved. She had to stop what she was doing and tear the house apart to find that one missing coin. The shepherd with the missing sheep and the woman with the missing coin were on a mission to find that which was lost. And having found what was lost, what do they do? They celebrate in grand style and invite others to join with them in celebrating: **"Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep/my coin that was lost"** (Luke 15:6, 9). This, Jesus tells us, is what it's like in heaven when one sinner repents and turns to the Lord in faith. The angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10). In fact, Jesus tells us that there is more joy over one sinner who repents than over many people who need no repentance (Luke 15:7). So the question for us is this: will we join in that celebration? Will we let go of old hurts and grievances due to sin, and with the angels of God rejoice when a lost sinner repents and returns to the Lord? There is room in the house of the Lord for all of us, no matter where we have been or what we have done.

Our own mission is grounded in Jesus' mission. What we do flows out of what He has done for us. That lost sheep and coin didn't just jump up into the hands of the shepherd and woman who knew they were missing. They had to get down to business and look for them. Can it be any different for us today? Jesus did not wait for his lost creation to turn and come to him of their own volition. We didn't because we couldn't. Blinded by sin, we were headed down a slippery slope toward death and destruction. Jesus is that faithful Shepherd who came into our lost and messed-up world to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). He saved us through his death on the cross, paying the penalty for our sin and disobedience. He now calls us to a mission: to get out there and seek out those who are lost and straying. We can't expect them to come in through the doors of this church, though sometimes they do. What we can and should expect is that Jesus is already out there ahead of us in daily life and that He provides opportunities to be Christ to our neighbor, to share his love in word and deed. Remember those five mission practices: seek the kingdom, hear from Jesus, speak and listen to people, do good, and minister through prayer? Through these, we join Jesus on his mission at home, school, work, and wherever we are. Wherever we are, Jesus is already there.

Having heard God's Word, what is God now calling you to do? On this Kick-Off Sunday as a new year of learning and growing in Christ begins, Jesus invites you to join him on his mission. Let that mission begin! Amen.