

✠ Luke 15:1-10 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

We have a wonderful God. He does not stay safely tucked away in theological postulations or other worldly discourse. He does not remain hidden behind the vague fog of being a god who lives and remains in the heavens. He is not a god who is only known by leaps of fantastic reason or in-depth study. Rather, He is a God who makes Himself known. He is a God who comes out of heaven and enters our lives in real time. He is a God who really loves you and really saves you from your sins.

He hunts you down, leaving no stone unturned and no thicket unsearched until He discovers where you have wandered off to. He does not stop looking until He has His arms around you, carrying you back to His fold where He keeps you safe, feeding and caring for you.

Such has He done for little Ethan. Like a sheep that wanders away unknowingly, little Ethan was lost. He was not a part of the flock of the Good Shepherd. But the Good Shepherd is not one to sit idly by and wait for the wandering sheep to return. He does not wait for the sheep to repent, but brings His sheep to repentance. He is not one to lazily sit back hoping that the sheep, who are dull and incapable of finding their way to His fold, will meander back to Him.

No, the Good Shepherd goes and finds the sheep. He is always vigilant, looking for His sheep in order to rescue them from the snares and traps of the evil one. He has no greater desire than to rescue you from the jaws of the wolf, the paw of the bear, or the sharp, jagged cliffs of unbelief and sin.

“But pastor, you don’t know what I’ve done, you don’t know the wickedness of my thoughts or the depth of my pride. You don’t know the severity of my lies or the freedom of my gossip. You don’t know the hatred of my heart or the evil of my lust. You don’t know the times that I have sought my own gain at the price of my family or friends. You don’t know the times I have slept with the enemy only to hurt the ones I should love. You don’t know me, pastor.”

But God knows you. Your sins are not hidden from Him. He is able to peer into the depths of your soul and discover the wickedness lodged there so that He may dislodge it. He knows your heart and your mind. He knows your weaknesses and your cover-ups. He knows you pretend to be holy and just when really you’re simply afraid of losing what you have. He knows your hypocrisy and your failure to love your enemies and your friends.

In fact, everyone knows of your sins, God has told the world your sins. As it is written, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23); all men are liars (Psalm 116:11); there are none who are righteous; all have turned aside; there is no fear of God before their eyes (Romans 3:10, 12, 18).” How often have you comforted yourself that you are forgiven and then turned and held the sins of another over their head? Do you call God a liar by continually calling to mind the sins of others that He has also forgiven? Do you repent of that sin? The sin of not believing His Word as you draw out the lists of wrongs committed against you.

Do you comfort yourself by saying, “God has forgiven all sins, so I don’t have to feel guilty about sinning.” There is a difference between not feeling guilty about past sins because you’ve sought God’s forgiveness and He has given it to you, and not feeling guilty about present and pleasurable sins because you lustfully say God has forgiven you, so that you don’t repent and seek forgiveness. Shamelessly you shame others in matters of indifference like how much tithe they give, whether or not they carry their own load at work, whether or not they are doing things the way you’d like for them to be done, while yourself remain unashamed of your own real sin such as the gossip you spread to smear names, the hurt you cause to exact revenge, the truth you stretch, lies told, to pamper your ego and hurt your neighbor.

You have gladly and willfully hidden behind the sins of others, real or feigned, preaching your own righteousness while parading their sins.

But there is no forgiveness for the righteous, because the righteous do not repent. By promoting your self-perceived righteousness you have, in effect, joined the party of the scribes and Pharisees. By looking at the sins of others, comparing their sins to your own, which always has you as the winner, you look down your nose at Jesus who died for their sins, contemptuously saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them, but I’ll have nothing to do with them.”

By not being ashamed of your own sins, by not repenting and confessing your own sins, you have in effect said that Jesus does you no good. For the righteous do not need a Savior, their own righteousness is their judge.

Repent. There is no rejoicing in heaven over one who says that Jesus has done them no good. But there is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. But do not merely say you are a sinner, admitting no more than even the unchurched admit by saying quip lines such as, “Everyone screws up once in a while,” or, “we’re all in this together,” or “I’m merely human.” For such false repentance is used only to justify yourself by hypocritically admitting that you’re no better than anyone else while you pad your ego with such false humility.

Repent as one who has taken pleasure in the sins of the world, for so you have. The briars our Lord seeks to free you of you have worn like a security blanket. The lies of your tongue that our Lord seeks to abolish you hang on to as if they were truth. The cliffs our Lord warns you of you pretend are gentle slopes leading to greener pasture and better watering holes. But the way of our Lord brings you to repentance. He has caught you in your sin. There is nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. You are trapped. You have been exposed. But do not be afraid.

For our Lord is like the woman who finds her husband in bed with another woman, and is glad. For He has found you. It does not matter where you are, what you have done, or with whom you have done it – He has chased you down and has found you! He speaks to you words of tender mercy and compassion, not bringing your sin before you to shame you and make you grovel, but utterly and wholly forgiving your sins by speaking as though you never sinned: peace be with you.

“I, the Lord, have found you though you were not seeking to be found, but wandering further and further away. I have rescued you from danger and saved you from certain doom. I will not let the wolf devour you. I will not let your sins have you – you are mine. I will feed you from my pasture, my body and blood, my Word. I will cleanse your wounds with my

wounds, and I will remember your wandering no more.”

Hear, O house of Israel, your Lord has spoken. Do not be afraid, for He has not found you to punish you and make you pay for your sins. But He Himself has paid for your sins and covered your guilt. Repent and be glad for so our Lord and His angels rejoice over you! Come and feed on His green pasture and drink from the River of Life that flows from His pierced side. He has brought you to repentance. He has brought you to safety. Your sins are forgiven. The peace of the Lord be with you always.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠