

St. Paul: On The Same page

09.08.13 Week #264

Day One: Ezek.34:11-24

For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness... ¹⁷ "As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet?

What do you see in all our pictures of the Good Shepherd and his flocks? Aren't they always in green pastures or at peace beside still waters? And yet, if they were always in such a lovely place then there would be no need for a shepherd to *lead* them through the dark valley to get there. (Ps.23)

"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?

Luke 15:4

In Ezekiel, God reminds his flock that he is fighting against the enemies of the flock. He himself will come and care for them.

But the shepherd is not only concerned about wolves. He scolds the flock itself because some of the flock are abusing the rest. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has come to lead us. But he also calls us to show the shepherd's love to one another.

Prayer: O Shepherd, kind and good, watch over your helpless flock. We, like sheep have gone astray, but you will never abandon us. Deliver us now from sin and sickness, death and despair. We trust you, O Jesus. Amen.

Day Two: Acts 6:1-7

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

Sometimes people ask me what I do all day. In fact, some people actually believe that a pastor only works on Sundays. That's not just a reflection on pastors. It's a reflection on the Church.

What does the church do in between Sundays? Anything?

The earliest Christians were certainly busy learning. They had a lot to learn about Jesus, and a lot to talk about as they considered what their new life as believers in Jesus should look like. They had to figure out a new way to look at many aspects of life and work.

But even though they could have spent all their time

in study of God's word, it was very important to them to be involved in caring for the needs of people. After all, that's what Jesus did even while he taught!

Jesus fed the hungry and healed the sick. He cared for people with many kinds of troubles, the result of living in a broken, sinful world.

Now, in our text, we see the early believers actually choosing 7 men to lead them in providing physical care for the needy. They chose men who were spiritually mature because this was important work. And what was the result?

It's not just that people were given food or medicine. The result was also that the church grew! The word of God grew and expanded to more and more places. Tertullian, an early Christian writer, says that many people remarked of the Christians, "See how they love one another!"

Would they say that of us today?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, choose me to be a deacon, a servant, and fill me with a desire to care for others. Let others see your love in me. Amen.

Day Three: Luke 15:1-10

“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? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ 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.’”

Have you ever found money on the street? Not a penny or a dime. Have you ever found a \$5 or \$10 bill, or even more? It feels great, doesn't it? We know the value of a dollar and we're excited to find even one.

Jesus is arguing with the Pharisees who grumbled about the company Jesus kept. But instead of debating with them about what is right or wrong, Jesus makes a much simpler point. He points out how valuable these people are – these sinners that they talk about. Each one is so precious that a shepherd would leave the whole flock to go get a single lost one back.

Take a look at the people around you. How much are they worth?

I'm sure you would rank your family high. You'd sacrifice a great deal for those closest to you. But the scale declines from there.

How much are your co-workers worth? Are they worth an hour of your time when they need to talk and you have “better things to do”?

What about the people you think are most worthless? Criminals, drug addicts, terrorists, predators. How much are such people worth? When each of them first wandered from the flock, how much did their heavenly Father grieve?

They may refuse to return. They may never come back. But we, like Jesus, should be seeking their restoration and rejoicing with all the angels in heaven when even one of them is restored to eternal life.

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, I was joyful when I found a few lost dollars. But those dollars are long gone now. Fill my heart with joy over those priceless treasures, your children, who return to you forever and ever. And move me to seek them with you. Amen.

Day Four:

Psalm 32

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered... For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long...

We often focus on visible sins because we can see them and talk about them. But almost all our sins are silent and invisible, aren't they?

The lust in our eyes and heart when we look at a woman or man who is not our spouse. The hatred in our heart when someone takes what we believe is rightfully ours, even something as insignificant as a parking place. The coldness of our hearts when others are in pain, but they are no one we know. No one can see any of these sins, but they each have their price. They eat away at our soul. We groan internally all day long when we see the truth about ourselves.

But "blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." The word "blessed" is closely related to the word for joy. In fact, the concept is all wrapped up with every idea of victory, triumph, riches, abundance, and happiness. We are blessed when God pours out his forgiveness upon us! We confess our sins, and we find happiness that overwhelms the grief we felt before.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I have been afraid to confess. Afraid to look that honestly at myself, and to bare my sins to you. But you already know me. Lord, look at me. Look at me in mercy and forgive me. Fill me with joy at your love and let it overflow to all those others around me who need to hear this good news. Amen.



Caring – in Speech, Gift, Deed

Our congregation is beginning a year-long emphasis on caring. We care for one another in the way we speak, and especially as we pray. Do you have a prayer list? Do you have a time set aside for prayer?

Consider the value of the one last sheep. Jesus cares for the lost one. He cares for the sheep of his flock. He cares for the widow and the orphan, the sick and the poor. For whom should you pray today?