



Sunday, September 11, 2022
Luke 15:1-10

Ascension Lutheran Church
Edwin Aparicio, Pastoral Intern

Grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word sheep is again in today's gospel. If you remember the last time I shared a sermon with you about a certain farm animal, you will recall that the word sheep can be a difficult word for me to pronounce correctly, so I wore a sheep hat, and you all assisted me in the sermon by saying the word for me.

But today instead of using the word sheep, I will use the word lamb. Hopefully you will still be as engaged in the sermon as you were when I was wearing the silly hat on my head!

My message this day it is about us as a congregation. A few weeks ago, I had the experience of leading the service in English by myself. Pastor Chris was on sabbatical and Pastor Tony was on vacation. It was just me up here. It was a wonderful experience. But let me tell you what happened approximately three months before that Sunday.

Well, Pastor Tony approaches me, gives me the news and tells me “Edwin in July, I will be on a short vacation with my family.” The conversation got interesting when he told me that he wouldn't be in church that weekend. At that moment, the only thing I thought was that it was God through the presence of the Holy Spirit that was giving me a great opportunity in my learning process. It is one thing to serve as an assistant to my two supervisors during the worship service, but it is another thing to do it by myself during the internship process.

I was instantly making mental plans. Pastor Tony told me, “Don't worry, I'll find another pastor to come and help you.” What do you think was my answer? My answer was: “You don't need to look for another pastor, please don't, I'm in a learning process and this is a wonderful opportunity for me.”

As we got closer to the date, both he and I became nervous. Me because it was my first time to be the only pastor in English worship, and he because he was worried about the attendance. He didn't tell me, but I could feel it. I knew he was worried that if the word got out that it was only going to be Intern Edwin with his accent leading worship that no one would come.

I remember that he told me that he was not going to announce it, but many realized that he was on vacation. Now we know how the story turned out. People knew they were going to a church service and sometimes would not understand everything the intern was saying.

You came to church anyways. I felt that I was treated with dignity by the congregation. This is a church that comes here to worship God. It's not about the pastor at Ascension, it's about God.

This welcome and inclusion has not just been shown to me. A sister from the Latino ministry was speechless, and almost cried when I asked her if she wanted to help as an assistant during communion. She was surprised and told me. Pastor, but I am a woman and where I come from women are not allowed to serve during worship, much less as a helper in communion. I take a deep breath, and my words to her

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and to all of us is that we are not in a flock where people are excluded, we are in a flock where everything possible is done to discern and practice that God sees all his lambs with the same eyes.

In our Gospel today, the tax collectors and sinners came to listen to Jesus. All of them responded to the call to come closer, to listen, to learn and witness all the wonders he did. Contrary to what happened with the teachers of the law, who did approach Jesus but not to learn, but to criticize his way of serving those without hope - the unprotected, the oppressed and those excluded from the community.

Tax collectors and sinners were not allowed to be included among the “righteous”. They were considered as people of low socio-religious status and therefore were counted among the excluded, condemned to live in a world without hope and without the right to enjoy the benefits of God grace.

After their criticism, as always, Jesus tells them two similar parables. In the parable, both the shepherd and the woman had the option of not giving importance to what they had lost because they had plenty. Those kinds of thoughts are exactly what often happens in our world today.

Sometimes we hear comments like "why worry if we have a lot, we lose one, it doesn't matter we have plenty, God has blessed us." When it comes to us, God does not think in that way. In the parable, we see that the two main characters were very worried and valued what they had lost. Both the shepherd and the woman showed that for them a lost lamb and a lost coin have the same importance as the ones they still had in their hand.

I think that when we hear this Gospel, we often only think of God's perspective that never leaves anyone out. It is the key part of this message, but it is much more important for us to reflect on how God acted in those circumstances and how we can continue this journey of discernment, and how we can do our best to never leave anyone behind.

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit be with you always.
Amen.