

THE GOOD SHEPHERD GOES AFTER HIS LOST SHEEP

Memorial Message for Lester Roger Halstead

Luke 15: 1-7 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Today, as I come to preach this memorial message, I come having had the privilege of coming to meet Roger Halstead about a year ago. My wife and I were in the home with Roger and Carolyn helping them with some spiritual counseling in a time when they had opened their home to help a family in need. That hour or hour and a half was the only time I met Roger, but I saw in him a man who was loving and had in him a respect and reverence for the Lord. Carolyn told me that Roger was not a demonstrative believer in the Lord, who most of the time kept his faith a private matter. Nevertheless, Carolyn let me know that she and Roger often prayed together for family and friends. This great grandpa who loved his extended family was a man who loved camping, hunting, and fishing, and along with his abilities with guns as an amateur gunsmith, was a stickler for hunter safety. Roger was fun loving and had a sense of humor, but he knew when to be serious. Carolyn knew that Roger deeply loved her and would do anything to protect her. Also, Roger was determined that Carolyn was to follow the Lord. More than once Roger sat down with Carolyn and they talked together about their lives together. In every talk, this man who grew up in the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, and was baptized and confirmed there, had a love for God that defined him. God used Roger's strong faith as a husband to also define his wife, Carolyn. Roger, like the shepherd Jesus spoke of in Luke 15: 1-7, was a shepherd at heart. He went after those who seemed lost to him. He always pointed them back to God.

Jesus was the greatest Shepherd in all the world and He defined Himself often as a shepherd who left those safe in the fold, the ninety nine, to go looking for a sheep that had wandered away. Jesus spoke of leaving the ninety nine in the open pasture, to go out into the wilderness to find a sheep that had wandered away. He would not leave a wayward, wandering sheep to itself to be killed by a wolf, a bear, a lion, an eagle or a coyote. Jesus had three patterns as a shepherd that still characterize His shepherding today.

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD, GOES AFTER LOST SHEEP. (I.) Jesus says in Luke 15: 7, “What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost...” This is the first activity and pattern of the Good Shepherd when He looks down from heaven and sees we are on the wrong track. That wrong

track can be a bad marital decision, a decision to run away from Jesus, it could be an addiction, it could be unfaithfulness to marriage vows, or it could be pride that keeps us aloof from God. The parable tells us the Good Shepherd goes after the lost sheep. The original word for “go after” in the Greek is “poreuomai” and it means to go on a journey, to travel hill and dale, or to leave home to go seek the lost. If there is anything Jesus did for us all, as we all were born in sin, was that He left the portals of Glory to come to earth as a baby, born of the virgin Mary. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to give His life and to shed His blood to save us. A lady hymnwriter named Elizabeth C. Clephane wrote a hymn based on this parable of Jesus way back in 1868. As a boy, since 1948, this hymn was a hymn I could sing all five verses since I was three years old. The first two verses speak of Jesus going after all of us as lost sheep.

The words of the song go, “There were ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold, but one was out on the hills away, Far off from the gates of gold. Away on the mountains wild and bare, Away from the tender shepherd’s care; Away from the tender shepherd’s care. Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine. Are they not enough for Thee? But the Shepherd made answer—this of Mine, Has wandered away from Me. And although the road be rough and steep, I go to the desert to find My sheep. I go to the desert to find My sheep.” Today, God is again after lost sheep. He comes to funerals and memorial services the world over. He reminds lost sheep that only those who repent, believe and receive Him can be saved and live forever in His heaven. God is here today by His Spirit seeking some of you here at this funeral who are lost. The Shepherd has a second pattern He follows as He seeks for lost sheep.

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD SEARCHES FOR HIS LOST SHEEP UNTIL HE FINDS THEM. (II.)

Jesus said in His parable that He goes after the sheep that is lost, “until He finds it.” This could be a three day search, a ten year search or a lifelong search. But Jesus never gives up. We may reject Him and hide from God, but as long as we have breath and are lost, Jesus comes looking for us. The next two verses of Elizabeth C. Clephane’s song goes, “But none of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through, Ere He found His sheep that was lost. Out in the desert, He heard its cry, Sick and helpless and ready to die, Sick and helpless and ready to die. Lord, whence are those blooddrops all the way that mark out the mountain’s track? They were shed for one who had gone astray, Ere the Shepherd could bring him back. Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn? They’re

pierced tonight by many a thorn. They're pierced tonight by many a thorn." I don't have to tell most of us here today that Jesus died on the cross for Roger, for you and for me. His hands were pierced with nails and so were His feet. He was crucified as He came to seek and to save us. His side was pierced. His back was scourged. His head was pierced with a plaited crown of thorns. He died for each one of us including Roger. There's one third and last pattern of the Good Shepherd when He seeks for us, and finally finds us.

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD, PUTS US ON HIS SHOULDERS AND REJOICING, CARRIES US HOME TO HIMSELF. (III.) Luke 15: 5-7 is so

beautiful. I read, "And when the Good Shepherd has found his sheep, he lays it on His shoulders, rejoicing. And He comes home, He calls together His friends and His neighbors, saying to them. 'Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." In essence, what God is doing today is, He is out seeking the lost, until He finds those who will not run from Him or hide from Him or be too proud to receive Him, until He finds those who will repent of sin, believe and receive Him. Then God celebrates. The greatest celebration of life is the celebration of God and all those who have died in Christ, when just one sinner comes to repentance and faith. The last verse of the song, "The Ninety and Nine," by Elizabeth C. Clephane is the crowning verse. As I told you, since 1948 when I was three years old, I knew this song by heart. I will sing the last verse to you. The words are, "But all through the mountains, thunder riv'n, And up from the rocky steep, There arose a glad cry to the gates of heaven, Rejoice I have found My sheep, And the angels echoed around the throne. Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own; Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own." Would you bow your heads? God is still out looking for lost sheep—He is looking for you if you yet have not repented of sin, believed, received Him and been born again. Would you give your life to Jesus at this memorial service for Roger Halstead? God is calling for you, knocking at your door. Would you give your life to Him? (Give invitation) Benediction: And now, dear Father, thank You for Jesus, that great Shepherd of Your sheep. Dismiss us with your comfort and hope and take us to the cemetery for our final earthly release of Roger's ashes to the earth. Help us to know with certainty that every true child of God who knows and loves you will soon live together forever with You in the Land where we'll never grow old, where there are no more tears, no more sorrow, no more pain, and no more death. We love You and thank You for Your comfort, in Jesus Name, Amen.