

# "Think Small and Aim Low"

Text: Luke 15:1-10

**"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."** (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Dear Fellow Christians:

It really is rather startling just how many things pertaining to the Christian faith are just the opposite of the way the world thinks and operates. In the world, if you owe a debt, you have to pay. In Christianity, we all owe a debt that someone else has to pay. To the world, you live and then you die. To the Christian, you need to die before you truly live. To be great in the eyes of the world means to tower above all others. In Christianity, greatest demonstrates as humble service to all. In the world, first is first and last is last. In Christianity, last is first and first last. To the world, success means gathering all you possibly can. To the Christian, success is measured by what you can give away.

It shouldn't surprise us then that whenever we hear someone described as "very successful" it pretty much always means that that person is making, or has already made, a pile of money. Doesn't that ever bother you? It does me. How did we ever get to the point (even in our mostly godless secular society) that we define "success" or "successful" in terms of money? Why not in terms of love, happiness, or contentment? Even the world places a high value on such things, so why is success always a measure of money?

As with all aspects of our lives, also here we need to take a good, hard, honest look and try to figure out just what the devil is up to. Because this has to be of Satan, doesn't it? It certainly wasn't God who taught us to evaluate and quantify our lives, and the lives of others, on the basis of money and possessions. In this case it really isn't a difficult process, is it? The devil's plan is actually pretty straightforward. We tend to be lazy, and money helps with that. We want to be admired, and money helps with that. We like stuff, and money definitely helps with that.

That's the devil's basic plan, but there's more to it. The accumulation of money tends to have the added "bonus" (as far as the devil is concerned) of absorbing both the best and the bulk of our time, thought, and energy. In case a little extra push is needed, he adds condescension and pity

when you focus your attention on anything other than the attaining of their idea of success. Moms who choose to focus on church and family are common targets here. *"You don't have a career?? You're wasting your life and your talents! You could be so much more... successful!"* Men are targets whenever they regard earning money as simply a means to a nobler end (serving their God and providing for their family) rather than an end in itself. The attacks are relentless, and frighteningly effective.

So we need help. We need reinforcement. Our text for this morning provides just that. Here our God talks about success as he sees it, instructing us, by means of yet more opposites, to *Think Small and Aim Low*. That text is found in the Gospel of Luke, the 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 15:1-10** *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." <sup>3</sup> ¶ So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> "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? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> 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.' <sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. <sup>8</sup> "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

So far the verbally inspired words of the Creator of all that exists. Pause for a moment and try to grasp the profound importance of such words, praying that the God who provided them for your study and meditation this morning would also grant to *you* the wisdom, strength, comfort and guidance that he intends such truths to provide. To this end we pray: **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

In keeping with the opposite nature of Christianity, Jesus in our text teaches us to think small. But he first had to teach us, by example, to aim low. The first verse of our text reveals just the latest problem that

his enemies were having with Jesus – just the latest in a very long list of the faults they assigned to him: ***Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*** In other words, the scribes and Pharisees condemned Jesus for hanging around with the wrong crowd. If he really wanted to get ahead, they reasoned, he needed to aim higher. Why didn't he?

Before we answer, we need to define "higher." Jesus doesn't see "high society" and "low society" the way we do. He simply sees souls. Individual souls. One at a time. And Jesus came to save souls. That was his singular goal and mission – to seek and to save that which is lost. He therefore spent his time where the harvest was plentiful. Then, as now, the rich and powerful seem to have better things to do than to be saved. So then Jesus here encourages us to aim low, but only according to the world's reckoning. In reality he is simply directing us to where the harvest tends to be the most plentiful. Notice that the last verse of our text doesn't say anything at all about high or low, rich or poor. It just says "sinner," and to God we're all the same until he works faith in our hearts. ***"Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."***

Do you have grand dreams or aspirations? Well, know right from the start that if your aspiration is to bring about world peace, you will be disappointed. Jesus said so. ***"But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen..."*** (Mark 13:7) If your aspiration is to eliminate poverty, you will be disappointed. Jesus said so. ***"For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good..."*** (Mark 14:7) If your aspiration is to make a name for yourself and to go down in history as a great individual, you will again almost certainly be disappointed, for ***"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*** (1 Peter 5:5)

Add one more to that list: If your aspiration is to make the whole world adopt a vegan diet, well, suffice it to say that you are in farm and ranch country here and you would probably have a better shot at wiping out war and poverty.

The problem, of course, is that God nowhere commanded you to bring about world peace. Nor did he command you to wipe out poverty, make a name for yourself, or eliminate the consumption of all food that actually tastes good. But he did tell you to ***"go and make disciples of all nations."*** The fact that God commanded this should tell us something. It

should tell us something about God's idea of greatness and of the direction of our aspirations and desires.

You've probably heard it before, but it certainly bears repeating: *When you stand before the Almighty Creator-God on Judgment Day, and when all of the vanities of this present life are swept aside, what alone will be left?* The answer, of course, is every single human soul. Each of those souls must then face an eternity in heaven or in hell. The Bible teaches this with perfect clarity: ***"And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... <sup>41</sup> "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels..."*** Matthew 25:33-41. All who believe in Jesus Christ will be saved. Those who do not will be damned.

Judging then from that vantage point, answer for yourself who or what should even now be considered great. The billionaire? The philanthropist? The inventor, musician, athlete, singer, dancer, politician? Will it be important on Judgment Day that you were able to hit a 95 mph fastball or throw an 80-yard touchdown pass? Will it matter how much money you made, how big your house was, or how many people recognized your face? Obviously not. God's idea of success always centers around eternity – and the souls that will experience one of two possible judgments.

Just as Jesus taught us in our text to aim low, so also in our text he taught us to think small. In other words, he defined success for us in terms of a single lost soul that is returned to the fold of his Heavenly Father – an occurrence so dramatic and so significant that it causes ***"joy before the angels of God."*** Try as you might you will not find another action on the part of man that produces such a spectacular reaction among God's holy angels. Truly remarkable.

The first key to success, therefore, and to gaining a proper sense of purpose and direction, is to adopt God's idea of what is and is not truly great.

Ever listened to a motivational speaker? If you have, you've probably noticed that they are all pretty much the same. The general themes are: 1) *Dream big and then pursue that dream*, 2) *You have the power within you to do great things – much more than you ever thought possible*, and 3) *Don't get discouraged - I did it, you can do it*.

Ever hear motivational speeches like that? If so, did they do anything for you? I mean *really* do anything for you – other than get you pumped up for a few minutes or maybe a few hours? Usually the motivation lasts no longer than the car ride home.

The big problem here is that the world's idea of motivation conditions us to look *inside* for greatness. Our text – in fact the whole of Scripture – teaches us to look *outward* rather than *inward*. The key to Jesus' parable had nothing whatsoever to do with introspective analysis on the part of the shepherd – as though he struggled mightily to determine if one of his strengths lay in seeking out lost sheep. A sheep was missing and he went to look for it. Virtually anyone could do it. And he found it – a truly great event in the estimation of the angels. The lost sheep represented a single human soul.

One human soul. And angels shouted for joy.

What this means is that the potential for success – as God defines success – is literally all around us, since there are *many, many* lost sheep. There are countless souls that now wander far removed from the Good Shepherd, their Savior Jesus. What is the special talent required of those who seek out these lost souls? Go back to Jesus' parable in our text. What special gifts or attributes were ascribed to the shepherd? None that you and I do not already now possess. Mostly the shepherd just loved and valued that which was lost. Where the shepherd laid the lost sheep on his shoulders, you can easily lift the lost sinner with the simple message of law and gospel – man's sin debt paid in full by Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who has already done all of the heavy lifting, having carried the punishment of every lost sinner upon *his* shoulders. He carried that burden to Calvary, and there he paid in full for all that you and I (and every single soul) owed.

Yet in our daily walk, Jesus is here teaching not to think about "the world," but to focus on just one individual soul. Just one. Don't think of the enormity of the need, which will just bring spiritual paralysis, think of the one. The shepherd in our text didn't search for the whole flock; he found one lost sheep. And the angels rejoiced. The woman didn't look for Aladdin's Cave of Wonders; she looked for one lost coin. And the angels rejoiced.

Think small – not in terms of the masses, but to think in terms of your neighbor, your friend, your family member. Not the whole auditorium, just the guy in the seat next to you. It means that you succeed as a dad when

you bring up even one child to know his Savior Jesus; or as a mom when you teach your child her prayers and sing her to sleep with the songs of her salvation. One at a time. Even just one. Amen.

## **Scripture Readings**

ESV **Ezekiel 34:11-16** "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. <sup>14</sup> I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

ESV **1 Timothy 1:12-17** I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, <sup>13</sup> though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. <sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. <sup>17</sup> To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – September 15, 2019**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 8 (Red Hymnal)

"Father, Who the Light This Day"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (Ezekiel 34:11-16) Our all-knowing God certainly is well aware when and how his children suffer. He sees the mistreatment of his people by the ungodly, and he knows when and how his children are being wronged and persecuted. The Lord not only knows, our first lesson assures us that he preserves his own and will gather them on the Last Day. On that Day of Judgment, all will be set right. "Come Lord Jesus!"

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 118 (Page 29) (Read Responsively)

**The Second Lesson:** (1 Timothy 1:12-17) Note especially in our second reading how Paul in no way attempts to justify his sinful conduct, even though he thought that he was doing the right thing by persecuting the early Christian Church. Nor did he imagine that the work that he did for his Lord following his conversion in any way paid for his past sins. Instead he freely acknowledged his own sin and trusted in his Lord for full and complete forgiveness – even referring to himself as the worst sinner that ever lived. That is the attitude every Christian should adopt, each of us seeing ourselves as "chief of sinners."

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 746 (Brown Hymnal)

"Father, Most Holy"

## The Sermon – Text: Luke 15:1-10 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"Think Small, Aim Low"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post Sermon Hymn – 466 (Red Hymnal)

"Christ, Thou Art the Sure Foundation"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 616 (Stanzas 1-3, 7-8) (Red Hymnal)

"Forever with the Lord"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance – Sunday (31) Average (40)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee hour
	<b>-11:20 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Mon-Wed</b>	<b>-CLC Board Meetings in Eau Claire</b>	
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Frank Gantt has returned the call to Bethel of Morris. Pastor Michael Wilke has returned the call to Prince of Peace of Loveland. The Call Committee for ILC is scheduled to meet on Tuesday of this week to call a professor to replace the retiring Paul Sullivan. Having called and installed Roland Gurgel, who has left our fellowship, Shepherd of the Valley Congregation of Weslaco has been suspended from membership in the CLC. Living Word Congregation of Blue Springs (Kansas City area) has announced that they will disband at year's end, due to steadily declining membership.

**September Board Meetings** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend CLC Board meetings in Eau Claire this week, leaving this afternoon and returning Thursday.

**Daily Rest** – Just a clarification that Daily Rest has an *annual* subscription that includes four volumes that are sent quarterly.

**Confirmation Class** – Confirmation parents and students please note that there is no Confirmation Class this week, since Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend out-of-town meetings. **Midweek Bible Class** is scheduled to begin on September 25<sup>th</sup>.