

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

“You Are Wanted”

Introduction: The Deadliest Profession

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the most dangerous job in the United States is timber cutter, a job that is common right here in Wisconsin. I was surprised to learn that that is the most dangerous job in the US because during my vacation I regularly watched a program called, “The Deadliest Catch.”

For those of you who have not seen the program, “The Deadliest Catch” is about crab fishing in Alaska. (I think some years it is the deadliest profession in the US.) If you don’t like your job, you should watch this program for a while.

The fishing takes place in the Bearing Strait in the winter. Water is thrown from the sea to the deck and then freezes. Many ships capsize due to excessive ice. Most days the fishermen begin their day by chiseling the ice off the decks while being drenched in freezing water. Then they have to climb into crab cages and hang rotten fish as bait. Then they lower the cages weighing hundreds of pounds into the water, hopefully without losing any limbs or fingers in the process.

One episode showed a champion rodeo rider on his first day as a crab fisherman. He quit before the day was through.

Dangerous Shepherding

In Jesus’ day, one of the most dangerous professions was that of shepherd. They were in danger from lions, wolves and bandits. Instead

of too much water and freezing cold, they faced scorching heat and dehydration. A shepherd could easily die while tending his sheep.

Today we might admire the machismo of a crab fisherman but in Jesus' day the shepherd was considered to be one of the lowest professions. They were dirty and smelly and couldn't take a shower after work as easily as people do today.

Normally, shepherds would watch one hundred sheep in a group of two or three. If one shepherd noticed that a sheep was missing, the other shepherds would herd them back to the village. There they would be put in a courtyard for safekeeping while the first shepherd would go out searching.

Searching for a lost sheep could be dangerous. If the sheep was stolen, the bandits might kill the shepherd to hide their crime. If the sheep were torn up by a lion, the shepherd might have to confront it. Even if the lion had killed the sheep, the shepherd had to get the remains or people might think he stole it.

Everything that I am telling you today would have been known to Jesus' hearers. They understood their own culture and what it meant for a shepherd to search for his sheep. The shepherd depended on the sheep for his livelihood and his neighbors depended on him to watch their sheep too. They had an economic stake in was lost. So when he came back alive and with the sheep, it was a double victory. It was natural that they would celebrate.

Seeking Our Lost Sheep

At the end of this parable, Jesus tells us that this story is not really about the domestic economy of first century Palestine. It is about the Kingdom of God extending itself to those who were outside of it. Jesus tells us that the angels in heaven celebrate every time a sinner repents. They celebrate that one more person has been added to the rolls of heaven.

I often wonder, “How much do we celebrate when someone is added to the rolls of heaven?” I don’t like to beat a congregation over the head about evangelism but we do need to reflect on this question occasionally. How much do we care that sinners are brought back into the fold? Are we a warm and welcoming congregation?

About two weeks ago, one of our members told me about a family who visited us after they moved to this area. They came to St. Martin one Sunday morning and no one said, “Hello” to them. They sat on the pews and no one said, “Welcome to our church.” They decided to join another congregation because they said the people were friendlier over there.

I understand that this is a big church and you may not know who the visitors are but it never hurts to smile and ask. If they aren’t visitors, maybe you will get to know one of your fellow members better.

Evangelism really isn’t that complicated on the local level. It is just looking for the right moment to bring up your faith or invite someone to church. Most people join congregations because a member (not the pastor) invited them. When people are church shopping, they often go to the church where the members seem friendly and accepting.

I know that this congregation is friendly and accepting but I wonder whether it appears friendly and accepting to a visitor. That’s a question we have to keep asking ourselves.

Jesus, Our Sheep Seeker

We do play a role in evangelism but it is also important to keep in mind that the primary evangelist is Jesus himself. Jesus tells us, “*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.*” (John 10:14) Jesus is the Chief Shepherd who goes looking for sheep. He doesn’t

want to lose even one. He will keep searching and searching no matter what dangers he faces.

Of course, Jesus did search for his sheep until it led to a danger that took his life. He wasn't killed by wild animals or even bandits but by men who were supposed to represent justice. Jesus was sent to death on the cross by the so called "good people" of his day. People like you and me who felt it was in their best interests to see him killed.

But God used their evil intentions for good. On the cross, Jesus paid the cost for every time we fail to seek the lost sheep. He paid for every time we fail to be friendly or to help a newcomer adjust to Clintonville.

Jesus is still seeking his lost sheep. Even death could not stop him. He rose from the dead and sent his Holy Spirit who continues to bring in lost sheep.

Conclusion

Most of you do not have the occupation of evangelist. You are called to be good at what you do – to be good mechanics, good teachers, good farmers or whatever the case may be. When the chance to speak about your faith presents itself, you will tell others about Jesus naturally. The Holy Spirit will produce that in you without you even thinking about it.

Jesus has the primary occupation of evangelist. He is the primary person who goes after the lost sheep. He has an occupation that is more dangerous than timber cutter or crab fisherman. He is *the* fisher of men and that is the most dangerous occupation of all.

*May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.*