

Subject: Sermon 9-30

Luke 15:1-10

INTRO - Yesterday I was talking to one of our members and she was talking about her son, Braden. Unfortunately, I have called him Brandon. Our directory listed him as Brandon. I confessed that and she said even his baptism certificate said Brandon. I was embarrassed and apologized. Graciously, this mother said not to worry, they are facing this mistake in other places. I felt worse.

I. I want to tell you someone who never forgets your name, someone who knows each of you personally, better than you know yourself. I want to tell you of someone, who knowing you, and even knowing your failures and sin, loves you with an eternal love. It is Jesus, our Lord.

A. Sometimes we forget that God loves us as individuals.

1. After all, God so loved the WORLD.
2. The World is a LOT of people.

B. But listen to our stories for today. These are pictures of God saying each individual is loved and important.

1. There were 100 sheep, and one was lost, and the shepherd cared so much for the one, he left the 99 and went looking for the one, as he would if any of the other 99 got lost.

2. There were 10 coins, and the woman swept and cleaned and put her life on hold to find the one coin, as she would have looked for any of the other 10

3. And, please realize what it means that the shepherd, and the woman went looking.

A. When that sheep was lost, it had misbehaved. The shepherd did not wait till the sheep came back, he went searching for the wandering stray.

B. John 10 also tells us of the good shepherd, who is able to protect and bring back his sheep paid the ultimate price - he laid down his life for the sheep.

4. God knows you, he knows your wandering, but he comes looking for you, paying the ultimate price to bring you home.

5. God cares for YOU as a person, as an individual. He knows you better than anyone!

C. This idea that God loves and cares for you as an individual is not found only in these verses.

1. In many places we are told that God knows us by name.

A. John 10:14 says, 14 "I am the good shepherd; I KNOW MY SHEEP and my sheep know me -- (NIV)

B. Isaiah 43:1 says, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

2. We are told of God's knowledge and care for us daily in Matthew 10:29-31 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

3. Matthew 6 says, If God feed the birds of the air, and clothes the lilies of the field he will MUCH MORE take care of us.

II. Yet, the church sometimes struggles with its care for the individual.

A. Let me share with you some of our struggles at St. John.

1. We have averaged about 250 in worship each Sunday this month. How many of you know ALL 250 people worshipping with you? In fact, people look around and don't know everyone. We should really have all our

members here, but there is a way in which that's a little scary too.

2. This week, I visited 11 individuals. Yet, there were 4 (Ross, Crystal, Bill, harms) more I wanted to get to and did not. And we have over 700 members.

B. This problem is not unique to our church. The of the church in Scriptures/

1. In the Old testament, how many people left Egypt? The Bible says 600,000 men, and then in addition to that the women and children. Exodus 18 is about Moses' struggle to care for all the people.

2. In the New Testament, how many people were in the church. On that first Pentecost day 3000 were baptized on the first day! And acts keeps saying the numbers grew. How did they express God's love for the individual? Acts 6 tells of that churches struggle to care for the individual.

C. It is not a bad thing, but a good thing when the church grows.

1. Jesus says in Matthew, "Make disciples of ALL NATIONS."

2. Jesus says in Mark, "Preach the Gospel to EVERY CREATURE!"

3. Jesus says in Luke, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins shall be preached to ALL PEOPLE."

4. Jesus says in Acts, "You shall be my witnesses. . . .to the ENDS OF THE EARTH."

5. God loves the individual. He loves you. But God loves ALL INDIVIDUALS.

D. So, how does the church reach out to the WHOLE WORLD with the Gospel, and at the same time love the individual as a unique and important child of God?

III. Let me take you back to Acts 2. There may have been 3000 baptized that first day, but we are told at the end of that chapter the people met in homes for fellowship, teaching, and the Lord's Supper. I don't know about you, but I can't fit 3000 in my home. I don't know anyone who can. In fact, I'm sure that was the case in Jesus' day. So, they reached out to everyone, but met in small groups.

A. Please take out the orange insert in your bulletin.

1. This is a postcard that will be sent to everyone in Palmer this week.

2. It is the intentional effort of St. John to care for the individual child of God through small groups.

A. On Sundays we have 3 Bible classes. One of those classes, the women's class has been meeting in the cry room for about 5 years now. They care for one another.

B. The women's Bible study on Monday night had 14 people there last Monday. For the most part it is a different group. They care for one another.

C. On Tuesday there were 7 youth that met at 7:00 a.m. before school. They were caring for one another as children of God.

D. On Tuesday night we had 4 men out of 12 who attended last year for a men's Bible study and prayer time. This year we are studying the ministry of Jesus on Tuesday's at 7:30 p.m., and the first Saturday of the month at 8:00 a.m. They care for one another.

E. On Wednesday morning about 8-10 ladies met to quilt and visit. They cared for one another as God's children.

F. Wednesday noon we had 12 people at our noon time Bible Class. We cared for and prayed for one another.

G. On Friday there was a Bible Class of good Christian friends who met and discussed Grace. They care for one another

H. This list doesn't even include the Saturday night worship, the coming Saturday Lay Ministry classes, or the children's choir on

Sunday. It doesn't include the groups we have discussed for singles, or adoptive parents.

B. Do you see what we are trying to do.

1. We are trying not to ignore the call of Jesus to reach out to all with the good news of his saving love, AND we are also trying to care for the individual, reflecting God's love and concern for the individual, FOR EACH OF YOU.

2. So, where worship is a time for all of us to CELEBRATE GOD'S LOVE, our small groups become places where Christian friends care for one another on an individual basis.

C. I hope you can find a place in one of these groups, or start another group for God's children. I hope you find Jesus and his love in the people around you.

CONCLUSION When I was in 4th grade I had the same teacher my dad had had, and the same teacher his his brother, 5 years older, had had. That was 1962-63. In 1986, 33 years later I was visiting my uncle and went with him to the grocery store. There I saw this teacher, Miss Czelusniak. She remembered me! Now, I THINK that's good. . . .

God knows each of you. He knows your unique traits. He knows your sin. He knows your name. And he loves you. At St. John, we want to share that love, so we can grow closer to the Lord, and grow in His work.