

Lectionary: 132

Ez 32: 7-11, 13 -14

Psalm 51: 3-4, 12-13, 17, 19

1 Timothy 1: 12-17

Lk 15: 1-32

The lighthouse stood magisterially in the same spot for over a hundred years. During those years, it was maintained by countless volunteers who pledged to give their life to the light that guided ships safely into the harbor. One day hurricane winds began to blow through the little town, and quickly it was reported that a ship was stranded off Cape Hatteras and, in fact, run ashore on the dangerous shoals. The call went out and the volunteers came to the lighthouse to see what could be done. There stood the captain: tall, husky, with a beard that hid most of his face and smelt like the sea itself. He was informing the volunteers what he knew for sure: hurricane winds getting close to sixty miles an hour, with wave surges getting very close to dangerous heights, and a ship and crew that needed immediate help. As he was explaining his plans a new volunteer shouted, "Captain, we can't go out! The odds are against us of ever returning! Let's wait until the storm dies down and then out go!" Without missing a breath, the old captain looked intently at the young lad and announced, "We have to go out. We don't have to come back."

The captain was right: We have to go out. We don't have to come back. Often we can't wait for the storm to die down before we do anything. We have to go out. That's what the shepherd does in today's gospel. In spite of the absurdity of leaving ninety-nine sheep vulnerable to wolves and thieves, he goes out in search of the one that went astray. Like the young volunteer in the story he could have retorted: "Listen, it's just one sheep! Chalk it up as a loss. We can't leave the ninety-nine for the sake of one stupid sheep that got lost!" On the contrary, we have to go out. So, too, like the father in today's Gospel story who goes out to meet his repentant son, we, too, must go out and embrace the lost, the sinful, and even those who have hurt us.

Throughout the gospels, that's exactly what Jesus did over and over again: He went out. He didn't sit with a committee and calculate the cost. No, he went out. Jesus didn't call his lawyer and ask if it's a good idea to be around sinners, tax collectors, pagans, or to hobnob with the lost, the forgotten, the unloved, or the unwashed. No, he simply went out. Like the Captain in the story, Jesus knew exactly who he was and what his mission is: to go out and bring salvation to anyone who was willing to listen regardless of the cost. In fact, for Jesus, the cost was high for such a way of living: the cross. But, even there in the very act of dying, he reaches out to the repentant thief and reassures him that today you will be with me in paradise.

So now it's up to us, Jesus' disciples. We must go out. When you feel as if you have reached the end of your rope with all the craziness of politician's rhetoric, or the news each day filled with more gun violence, or that another child's life was put in danger, go out. Yes, go out into the world and bring the Good News. Go out and be Jesus to a world that needs him more than ever. Go out and bring reconciliation and peace to someone in your parish, family, or neighborhood that needs it. Like the volunteers, let us pledge our lives to the Light that shines through us which has the power to bring hope, peace, and love to a hungry world. In short: this week....go out and make a difference.

*Written by Fr. Larry Tensi  
Pastor, St. Columban Church  
Loveland, OH*