Jonah 1:1-3, John 7:32-36

“Seeking the Lost”

You know, I’ve been thinking this week and I realized that during Advent our campaign of each one reach one, when we were asked to bring someone to church who wasn’t currently involved in any church, was a bit of a flop. We didn’t do very well, did we? It is hard to reach out to others and invite them to church. But maybe, we are doing it all wrong.

Today we have two Scriptures that are drastically different from each other, but each have references to the seeking of the lost. Our first, Jonah, we should know pretty well because of Sight and Sound and the storyline of the prophet running away from God’s command. We then look at Jesus who tells those gathered that he will not always be there and they assume he means he will be seeking the lost in the most undesirable places possible, among the Greeks.

The way in which we as a church understand seeking the lost is opening the doors and having them come to us. We have so much to offer. Next week there will be an article about the well in the paper, we have a great worship, our youth program is taking off. If we just are able to make our programs, our building our people appealing enough, the lost should come to us. That is the approach of LCBC, right? Last night we were there with the confirmation class. We have an awesome confirmation class this year. I call it Gabe and his girls. We go every year with a different confirmation class and it always reminds me of ways in which to do ministry that is so different from how we do ministry.

But when we look at Scripture and we find God pursuing the lost there is a consistency that is stunning. Time after time we find him sending people to where the lost are themselves, whether it is Jonah who goes to Nineveh or those who are truly lost among the Greeks that Jesus is thought to be going to see.

You see what we have to offer here while it is all good and very appealing, it cannot compare to what we have to offer in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and that we need to take to the world so we don’t just have it for ourselves. Let’s read.

**READ**

I had lunch at the Swan the other day. I had a liverwurst and onion sandwich, and as far as liverwurst and onion sandwiches go I guess it was pretty good. I went with another member of the church because I knew that if the pastor is seen hanging out in those establishments it isn’t always interpreted in the best light.

I remember as a pastor in Florida I would spend a couple hours every week speaking with Russel on main street. Russel was a self-made millionaire who had made it his goal in life to put a bar and an adult story in the heart of Palatka, Florida, which was so conservative that it made Strasburg look like San Francisco. He did eventually put up a bar but we talked him out of the adult store. Not everyone was happy with the amount of time that I spent with him every week.

In Italy we would ask members of the church to host Bible studies in their houses and invite the neighbors to come and take part, and they would. All of their neighbors would come and I remember one Wednesday evening when there were literally people from the outside looking into the windows and we must have had 30 or 40 people listening to, guess which Gospel, John, being read and explained. We would easily have more people at these Bible Studies than in church. Our concept of evangelism is each one reach one and bring them here, into the church. That way we can grow the church and the ministries of the church so that more and more people can come…here. This is a completely foreign concept in Scripture.

We are so intent, okay, let me speak for myself, I am so intent in getting people into the church that we forget the model of evangelism that we find in Scripture. Let’s look at Jonah. It is clear here that Jonah’s task was not typically bringing the good news to a people who had never heard it. Instead it was to: “cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.” Basically, he told Jonah to go tell Nineveh that they were doomed, condemn them.

Jonah was not commanded to establish a church and invite the Ninivites to attend. Jonah, each one reach one. Rather, he was given the typical missionary command to go ye therefore, into all the world. Jonah, like us, was terrified of this command. The Ninnivites were the undesireables, their worst enemy. There was no one who he would rather have not gone to see.

So, he refuses. He doesn’t go to Nineveh. Twice it states that he fled from the presence of the Lord. You see, Jonah was not convinced that God would protect him and keep him. He had no confidence that God would be by his side. He had no trust that God would protect him so his actions were, well, cowardly.

When I was in middle school my older brother and I walked into a WAWA one night and this older teenager who was totally drunk bumped into me on purpose and it was obvious that he wanted to fight me. I’ll never forget my brother getting in this person’s face and basically scaring him and his friends in such a way that they left the store and nothing happened. From then on I knew my brother had my back, regardless of how many times we may have fought, and we did fight, broke a few beds back in our days fighting, but I always knew that he had my back. And I’ve been riding his coattails ever since. You know, we should have no shame in riding the coattails of our Savior Jesus Christ for our entire life. He has our back, and so we don’t have to be ashamed of him. If we only knew that then we would have no fear and no shame in seeking the lost.

When we look at our New Testament Scriptures we find Jesus still in Jerusalem and people are muttering and spreading rumors about him possibly being the Messiah. As a result, the religious leaders in vs. 32 sent temple police to arrest him. You know when I think of the temple police I think of Bart the mall cop or those unfortunate policemen who have the task of chasing down the streakers in a football game, they don’t tend to be the most nimble of foot.

In fact, we read that these poor temple police have no success in getting Jesus, after all if he is in the temple, the police are in the temple you would think that it wouldn’t be that hard to get him. But we find the police say in vs. 46 when they came back empty handed without Jesus: “Never has anyone spoke like this.”

How does Jesus speak in regards to seeking the lost? In Matthew 28:19 we hear: “go ye therefore into all the world and make disciples of all nations. Jesus was all about seeking the lost by going where they were. He went to the home of the tax collectors, ate with the prostitutes, walked the streets with the drug addicts, hung out with the young couple sleeping together and not married. Jesus knew how to find the lost. He went where they were.

In vs. 35 the people are confused because Jesus says he will go where they cannot follow, which related to his death and resurrection. The people sarcastically said, yeah, he’s probably going with the Greeks. They were the unlovable for the Greeks. They were the enemy, those who you stay away from as much as possible. They were the Ninnevites for Jonah, the terrorists for America, those within our own country that we don’t like, those living in the bad neighborhoods in Lancaster. In our book, they are the lost, and we want them to stay that way. No way are we going with them anywhere, or will be seen with them.

The reality of the world today is that the face of Christianity looks very different from our faces. 66% of all Christians in the world are Asian, or African, or Mexican, or South American. When we think of the lost we normally think of the heathen and they look a lot like the people I just mentioned.

As a missionary who spent 5 years serving Americans living overseas I can tell you we are far more lost than the African disciples from Nigeria who spend hours a day in prayer, or the Korean whose love of Christ has taken over their country. We call ourselves Christian and we are, we know we are saved, but a disciples actually has a passion for Christ that is lived out and has an effect on their life.

Seeking the lost is a way of life for one who loves Jesus. Our faith commands us to go, to live, but we fail, and I’m not just talking about each one reach one. My prayer for us as a church is that we will not be satisfied with being the Jonah’s who know God and love God and are happy to be called Christians, or children of God, but then when we are asked to actually serve in a fundamental way such as going out to seek the lost, that we refuse and turn our back on our Savior and run.

This week, look for opportunities to seek the lost. Don’t put yourself in a compromising position, but put yourself out on a limb by living out your faith.

Amen.