



GOSPEL FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Luke 15:1-10

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So He told them this parable: "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? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 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.' 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."

"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? 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.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

1. This Gospel reading contains the teaching we regard and praise as our chief teaching and which is genuinely called the Christian teaching, namely, about grace, the forgiveness of sins, and Christian freedom from the Law. It is a very delightful and pleasant admonition to repentance and the knowledge of Christ. It is always sad when a godless, impudent person hears such excellent, comforting, and cheerful preaching. It is much sadder when everyone finishes learning it so soon and masters it so that he imagines he knows it so well that he need not learn anything more from it. Nevertheless, God our Lord does not become put off or tired of annually—even every day—repeating and urging it, as if He knew nothing else to preach and had nothing further to say. We poor, miserable people so quickly become far too learned—and in addition so satiated, weary, and bored—that we have no more desire or love for it.

2. However, before we take up the article taught here, we want first to look at what St. Luke says in the introduction to show why Christ preached this. He says, "Tax collectors and all kinds of sinners came to Christ because

they wanted to be near Him and listen to His words" [Luke 15:1]. He frankly and openly expresses what kind of people He had about Him, namely, those who lived openly as they should not live and were known as complete sinners and evil people. It could seem that the Pharisees had sufficient reason to fault Him, who wanted to be a godly, holy man, for associating with such people.

3. At that time people here and there in the land rented from the Romans a city, a toll, or another area of administration or office and gave them a specified amount of money from it; they were called tax collectors. Likewise now, the Turks or the Venetians put someone into a city or an office and set so many thousand gulden¹ a year which he must give them from it; whatever he can extort over that is his. Thus those who collected such tolls and the money imposed acted so that they had their profit from it. Because the sum [they had to pay] was large, set for a city or an office, these officials had to exploit people very confidently so that they would have full benefit from it. Their masters were so strict with them that they could not acquire much [for themselves], if they wanted to act justly and overcharge no one. This is why they were infamous in every land for being exploiters, in whom much godliness and honesty were not to be sought.

4. Similarly, people called the other great crowd "sinners" in general, who otherwise were rough people and openly lived a shameful, wild life in greed, prostitution, etc. Such people happened to come to Christ because they wanted to listen to Him, because they had heard that He was an excellent teacher and did many miracles.

5. Nevertheless, there is a spark or two of virtue and righteousness in them, since they have a desire for Christ and would gladly listen to His preaching. They want to see what He does, because they know He is a righteous man, and they hear nothing but good from Him both in words and works, even though their character did not at all agree or harmonize with His life. Nevertheless, they are not hostile to Him, nor do they flee from Him; rather, they run to Him and seek nothing evil from Him, but want to see and hear something good from Him; there is hope that they can be reformed.

6. On the other hand, the Pharisees and the scribes, who were regarded and celebrated as the most righteous and holy, are still such poisonous vermin that they are not only hostile to Christ and do not want to see or hear Him, but they also cannot bear that the poor sinners should come to Him and listen to Him so that they might be improved. They even grumble and fault Him for letting them come to Him and for tolerating them, and say: "Look, is this the very holy man? Who will now say that He is from God, since He associates with such evildoers and wicked people?" Yes, He is a "glutton" (as

¹ See sermon for Easter Sunday on Mark 16:1-8, fn. 7.

they say elsewhere [Matt. 11:19]) and a "winebibber, the friend of tax collectors and sinners."

7. He must have such names from these holy people, not because He carouses and eats and drinks with them, but only because He lets them come to Him and does not repudiate or despise them. [They thought] that He should have done that, gone about in a gray coat, looked sad, and been separated from ordinary people. If He saw such tax collectors and sinners, He should have held His nose and turned His eyes away, so that He would not be dirtied by them. As holy people, they were accustomed to do this. Isaiah writes about them that they have kept themselves so pure that they could not tolerate it if a sinner touched them [Isa. 65:5]. This also can be seen in the example in Luke 7 [:39] of how the Pharisees became angry at Christ because He let Himself be touched by the sinful woman. These are the ones who always found fault with Him and who wanted to dictate to Him and make rules for how He should act and live in a holy way. This is why they grumble here that He does not stick to them and avoid such public sinners, as they do.

8. Now, Christ is also a little obstinate and shows here that He simply will not be told what to do or be restrained in anything. Everywhere in the Gospels it is seen that there is a special obstinacy in this man, who was otherwise a more gentle, willing, and helpful man than anyone else on earth. However, when they come to Him with laws and want to tell Him what to do, then all friendship is over; He is repulsed and recoils as when you strike an anvil, and He says and does only the opposite of what they demand from Him. He does this, even though they speak correctly and quote God's Word, as they do here when they come and say, "You should do this: You should stick to righteous people and not to sinners." This is a precious teaching taken from Scripture, for Moses himself writes that they should avoid the wicked and remove the wicked from themselves [Deut. 23:9]. They have the text on their side, trot out their Moses, and want to hit the man with their Law and rule Him according to it.

9. However, whether it is called God's Law or man's law, He will, in short, not be restrained. He is just like a unicorn, about which people say that it cannot be captured alive, no matter how much it is hunted and chased. It can be pierced, shot, and killed, but not captured. He does the same; even though people want to attack and capsize Him with laws, He does not tolerate it, but rips through it as through a cobweb and gives them a good lecture. For example, when they accused His disciples of plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath, and alleged God's command to rest on the Sabbath, etc. [Exod. 20:8-10], He turned it completely around, ripped through the command, and proved the opposite both with Scripture and examples (Matthew 12 [:1-8]). Likewise, when He tells the apostles that He will suffer and be crucified, and

Peter steps forward out of the best intentions with the law of love, holds out to Him God's command, and says, "Lord, take care of Yourself so that this does not happen to You!" He gives him a good strong rebuke, treats him in a rough and unfriendly way, and says, "Remove yourself from Me, you Satan, for you do not intend what is God's, but what is human" (Matthew 16 [:21-23]).

10. In summary, wherever they try to deal with Him only with laws, He will not tolerate it, but will be free from all laws and the Lord over them; He will not keep any law as if He had to do so. Yet, on the other hand, when it comes from Himself, no law is so small that He will not gladly do it, even do much more than the law could demand, so that no more willing, useful man could be found, if He is not told what to do. Yes, He lowers Himself so deeply that He washes and kisses the feet of His betrayer, Judas [John 13:2-5], and Himself protects the disciples at night (as the legends say about Him, which are certainly to be believed). He even Himself says, "I did not come so that people would serve Me, but so that I would serve everyone," etc. [Matt. 20:28].

This certainly includes works of the Law, but not as if they were forced from the Law or through the Law. We can see in His life that He always moves and goes back and forth in the land, sleeps on the ground at night, fasts forty days [Matt. 4:2; Luke 4:2], has no rest, and works so hard that they are concerned that He might lose His mind or harm His body [Mark 3:20-21]. He does everything He should and can, except that He will be unconstrained and have no laws imposed on Him. If someone tries to do that, then He blocks it and defends Himself most firmly. Thus He is both the most obstinate and the kindest of all, and at the same time there is no more stubborn or useful man, who will do nothing to which people want to compel Him with the Law, and yet He does everything and overflows like a flood with good works, if only people let Him do them of Himself, without trying to tell Him what to do or to teach Him.

11. This has now been written down as an example, so that we would learn what a genuine Christian man He is according to the Spirit, and not judge Him according to the Law nor tell Him what to do from our cleverness. Christ is our Lord so that He can make out of us such people as He Himself is. Just as He does not allow people to bind Him with laws, but is Lord over the Law and all things, so also a Christian's faith should not allow that. We are to be so exalted and liberated through Christ and His Baptism that our conscience by faith knows of no law, but is simply not told what to do or condemned by it. We are to feel nothing else in the inward nature of our conscience than that there has never been any law on earth—neither ten nor one commandment, neither God's nor the pope's nor the emperor's—but

we are always at liberty, so that we can say, "I know of no law, nor do I want to know of any."

12. In the estate and way of life in which we become Christians, our and all people's work ceases, and so also all laws. For if there are no works, there can also be no laws that demand the works and say: "You shall do this. You shall not do that." Rather, through Baptism and Christ's blood we are simply free from all works, justified out of pure grace and mercy, and also live before God alone for them. This, I say, is our treasure according to which we are Christians and live and continue before God. How we live in flesh and blood according to the external life does not belong here.

13. Therefore, a Christian must learn to control his conscience before God so that he lets it be taken captive by no law. Rather, if someone wants to attack his faith in that way, he should be and act against it, as Christ does here and elsewhere. He acts so obstinately, unusually, and wonderfully that no Moses or legalist can get along with Him, even though otherwise He is the humblest, gentlest, and friendliest man.

14. However, this is a very great skill, which no one else knows except He alone; He was the master, who could repulse all laws and teachers of the Law. However, we cannot do this, for the devil has free play in our flesh and blood, when he lays hold of a man's conscience and calls him to account for what he has done and not done and disputes with us about both our sins and godliness. In this way the man is led into a clay pit and deep mud, so that he cannot get out and only sinks deeper and deeper. It weighs on him like a heavy burden and oppresses him, so that he cannot rise above it, but goes and torments himself about it and cannot be satisfied. I also feel in myself that I cannot get out of the hole, even if I work constantly and kill myself over it, so that I might rise above the Law and accomplish so much that it would have to be quiet and say, "All right, now you have done enough; now I am satisfied with you!" But that does not solve it, for it is such a deep pit out of which no one can climb, even with the help of all the world, as those who have attempted it and still daily experience can testify with me.

15. Now, the cause of this is that our whole nature is so very ready to be occupied with works and laws and to follow those who say: "Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners? [Matt. 9:11]. If He would eat and drink with us, then He would do right." Likewise: "Why do Your disciples pluck the ears of grain and do what we should not do on the Sabbath?" etc. [Mark 2:24]. They want to deal and dispute with the Law continually until it says, "Now you are righteous." [Our whole nature] cannot rise higher nor understand more than that the teaching of the Law is the highest teaching, and its righteousness is the best life before God. Thus it eternally remains captive and bound to the Law. When it undertakes and attempts it, it can

never get to the point that it quiets the Law, so that there is nothing left to require or punish in it, but it must remain captive to it its whole life as in an eternal prison. The longer it defeats and kills itself with the Law, the worse it becomes until it perishes.

16. What, then, should I do when the Law attacks me and afflicts my conscience because I feel that I do not do what it requires? Answer: Look at how stiff-necked Christ is, and how He is obstinate and lets no law be forced on Him, even if it is taken from God's commandments. Learn to do the same and simply say to it: "Dear Law, defer your debating and go your way, for I have nothing now to do with you. Yes, just because you come and want to talk with me and ask how righteous I am, I will not listen to you. What counts before this Judge, before whom we are now disputing, is not what I am and should do or not do, but what Christ is, gives, and does. We are now in the bedroom, where bride and groom should be alone, where it is improper for you to enter or to say anything."

17. Nevertheless, it always knocks and says, "Yes, but you should do good works and keep God's commandments if you want to be saved." Answer once again: "Listen up, it is wrong to talk about that. I already have my righteousness and the chief part of all salvation without any works, in my Lord Christ. I was already saved before you came, so that I need nothing at all from you." Where works do not count (as I have said), the Law does not count either, and where there is no Law, there is also no sin [cf. Rom. 5:13]. Therefore, nothing should rule in her bedroom except the bride alone with Christ, in whom she has everything together and lacks nothing that is necessary for salvation. The Law, when it wants to attack the conscience, must be left outside with its drumming and piping, and be confidently despised and repudiated. It does not belong here; it comes at the wrong time. In addition, it wants to make a great ado where it should not intrude. Here we are in the article [of faith] which says, "I believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, who suffered, died, and rose again for me," etc.,² before which Moses, the emperor, and God's laws must yield. [This article] banishes anything that would dispute with me about sin, right or wrong, and everything I can do.

18. Look, in this way Christ wants to depict for us this freedom, so that we as Christians according to our faith will tolerate no other master, but simply cling to the fact that we were baptized and called to Christ. Through Him we were justified and sanctified and say: "This is my claim, my treasure, my work, and everything against sin and wrong (which the Law can do and bring against me). If you want to have another claim, work, law, or sin, then do with them what you want, but they cannot stay with me." This is the way for a man to defend himself and withstand the devil's promptings and

² The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed (Kolb-Wengert, pp. 21-22; *Concordia*, p. 16).

temptations, whether they are for past or present sins. This is the way to keep far away from each other both Moses and Christ, works and faith, conscience and outward life. If the Law wants to frighten me and my heart, then it is time to bid farewell to the dear Law. If it will not go, then confidently banish it and say: "I will gladly do and encourage good works when I can at the proper time, when we go out among people. However, here where my conscience is to stand before God, I will know nothing about them. Leave me in peace, and say nothing to me about my doing or not doing. I listen neither to Moses nor to the Pharisees; rather, Christ alone will rule here and be everything. Just like Mary, I will sit at His feet and listen to His Word. Martha, however, can remain outside, be occupied in the kitchen, do her housework, and leave my conscience at peace [Luke 10:38-42]."

19. "But if I still always have sin in me, is this really not right?" Answer: Yes, it is true. I am certainly a sinner and do wrong. However, I do not despair because of it or run into hell or flee from the Law. I have still a claim and a work which are above Moses, through which I take hold of Him who has taken hold of me [Phil. 3:12], and hold onto Him who has embraced me in Baptism, laid me in His bosom, through the Gospel has advanced me to fellowship in all His benefits, and commands me to believe in Him. Where He is, there I can command the Pharisees, Moses with his tablets,³ all lawyers with their books, and all people with their works at once to be quiet and yield. Then no law has any right to accuse or make demands, even if I have not done it nor can do it, for in Christ I have in abundance everything I need or lack.

20. This, I say, is the Christian's teaching and skill, and it only belongs where Christ reigns and the conscience deals with God. This, however, is not preached to rough, impudent, and thoughtless people, for they understand nothing about this and (as St. Peter also says [2 Pet. 3:16]) twist and pervert this doctrine to their own destruction. They take from this teaching an excuse to live as they please and say: "Why in the world do I need to do good works? What does it hurt if I am a sinner? Has Christ not abolished the Law?" etc. Now, this also is wrong, for here you must also look at Christ from another angle, at what else He does. Here He Himself says that He is the man who seeks the poor lost sheep [Luke 15:4-6], and then demonstrates it by this present deed: receiving the sinners and tax collectors and preaching to them. So you see that He does much more than the Law has commanded, and He teaches you with His example to do the same.

He is so proud that He will not be under the Law, and, on the other hand, He is so willing that He even wants to do much more than the Law can

³ I.e., the First Tablet of the Law (Exod. 20:3-11) and the Second Tablet of the Law (Exod. 20:12-17).

require. You also should live in such a way that you do not just wait until you are forced and afflicted with the Law, but do what you should on your own without the Law. St Peter admonishes: "As those who are free, but yet not as if you had freedom as a cover of wickedness, but as the servants of God" (1 Peter 2 [:16]). Paul says, "Now that you have been freed from sin, you are servants of righteousness" (Romans 6 [:18]), that is, those who do everything with a free conscience without the coercing of the Law.

21. If the Gospel is truly in the heart, it produces a person who does not wait a long time until the Law comes but is so full of joy in Christ, and has desire and love for what is good, that he gladly helps everyone and does good wherever he can out of a free heart, before he ever once thinks of the Law. He risks his body and life, and cares nothing about what he suffers for it, and is thus full of good works which flow forth from himself. Similarly, Christ would not be compelled to pick up a single straw, but, uncompelled, He lets Himself be nailed to the cross for me and all the world and dies for the lost sheep. This is truly work on top of work.

22. Therefore, learn now to distinguish well, put these two points in order, and divide them so that, when it comes to the point that the Law and sin are disputing with your conscience, you can confidently contradict Moses and tell him to be quiet. You can turn him out onto your old man, whom Moses can take to school, dispute with him, and say: "Listen, you are both lazy and slow to do good and serve your neighbor. When you should praise Christ, you prefer to drain a mug of beer. Before you will endure danger for Christ's sake, you much prefer to rob and cheat your neighbor wherever you can." For this lazy rascal who will not move, whose hands will not work, whose feet will not go where they should, whose eyes are not chaste, you can take stone tablets⁴ and beat that donkey with them so that he has to move.

23. "Therefore, when you attack me in the right way" (thus you should say to Moses), "I will gladly listen and follow you, namely—apart from faith and the righteousness of my conscience before God—you can rule over my hands and my life like a taskmaster among the servants of the house. You can tell me to be obedient, chaste, patient; to do good to my neighbor, help the poor, praise and glorify God; to let myself be reviled and slandered for the sake of His Word; and to permit the world to impose all its afflictions on me. I am content with all of this and willing to do even more than I can according to my external man." "The spirit is willing," says Christ, "and more than willing, even though the flesh is weak" [Matt. 26:41]. So He let Himself be circumcised [Luke 2:21], brought sacrifices to the temple [Luke 2:22-24], let Himself be scourged and crucified—none of which was necessary for Him, nor could the Law demand it from Him.

⁴ I.e., the First Tablet and Second Tablet of the Law.

"However, if you want to grasp further, where you should not go, into my heart and conscience, then I will neither listen to nor look at you. I have there a different, huge, inexpressible treasure, who is called Christ with His Baptism and Gospel. In summary, as far as the external person is concerned, you cannot impose or do too much, but you are not to impose anything at all on the conscience." If the Spirit who brings us Christ is present, the person is above all laws, as Paul says, "No law has been given to the righteous person" [1 Tim. 1:9], and yet he nevertheless does more than he could accomplish according to the flesh. According to the flesh we are nothing but sinners, and as far as our person is concerned we would have to remain condemned under the Law. However, because of Christ and Baptism we soar high above all laws.

24. Thus Moses is to carry on his coarse work apart from Christ, as he urges on those who are not Christians, or even the old man, and makes them righteous in the eyes of the world. He does not in that way make the Christians good or righteous, but what he does do is show them their office, which they gladly do according to the Spirit. Although the flesh does not want to nor can follow the Spirit, and so still needs to be admonished and restrained, nevertheless the conscience remains free, because the Law has no right to accuse and condemn it before God. Therefore, we must let there be such teaching and admonishing in Christendom (as the apostles also did), so that each one is exhorted and reminded of what he should do in his estate.

25. However, we must let Moses rule over the others who are not Christians and trouble them with both fist and conscience, so that he can force and afflict them to do what is right and omit what is wrong, even if they do not do it willingly. Such are the shameful rabble and stiff-necked people, who do not esteem or understand the freedom of Christ, even though they can prattle and brag about the Gospel, which they only misuse to their shame. They ought to know that they belong under Moses.

These people, who go about in security and imagine that they do not need the Gospel, or else know it well, cannot grasp this teaching. Rather, only those whose consciences dispute with the Law because of their sins and God's wrath, and are frightened and feel it, [can grasp this teaching], so that their heart says: "Woe is me! How have I lived? How will I stand before God?" Thus they go about all too fearful and timid while the others are all too obstinate and arrogant, so that they do not feel or esteem any law or their sin and distress. Thus both are apportioned incorrectly: Those who should have nothing to do with the Law have all too much—yes, they only feel it. The others, however, who should only feel it are not at all concerned about it; yes, the more you try to frighten them with the Law and God's wrath, the more obstinate they become. Therefore, they need a different master—namely, the hangman and the jailer—who teaches them that if they do not want to do

good in God's name, then they have to do it in someone else's name and have as their reward no thanks, but hellfire and all affliction.

26. On the contrary, here and everywhere (as I have said) Christ wants both with His example and with His preaching to teach us, who feel our sins and the burden of the Law and would gladly be Christians, that we should accustom ourselves to resist it, to point it away from us to Him, and not to leave room for the devil. Through the Law he wants to break open Christ's bridal chamber and sit in His place, that is, take away the conscience's joy and comfort in order to drive the man into despair, so that he cannot lift up his head or his heart before God. It is the Christians' skill to learn and know something more than the ordinary, vulgar crowd knows and can understand, namely, that they can fight with the devil and withstand him when he attacks us and wants to dispute with us from Moses. We should not grant him any disputations and dealings, but simply point him away from Moses to Christ and remain with Him. But he acts in such a way that he cunningly brings us away from Christ under Moses, for he knows that if he accomplishes this, then he has already won.

27. Therefore, see to it that you do not let yourself be led astray or enticed out of this circle. Rather, even though he reproaches you with many things from the Law, which is also God's Word, which you are obliged to obey, yet you can answer him and say: "Listen up! I do not want to know or hear about any law. We are now in the circle and on the place where people do not ask what they are to do or not to do. I certainly know ahead of time that I have not done nor do I do what the Law requires. Rather, the question is how we are to obtain a gracious God and the forgiveness of sins and learn the article about Christ. I will remain in the Lord Christ's arms, hang around His neck, and crawl into His Baptism, no matter what the Law tells me or my heart feels. If we only keep this chief point pure and this castle firm and well secured, then I will gladly do and suffer outwardly as much as people inflict on me.

28. Whoever would learn this skill well would be a genuinely perfect man, as Christ was. He was so far above all laws that He dared to call even St. Peter a devil [Matt. 16:23], the Pharisees fools [Matt. 23:17, 19] and blind leaders [Matt. 15:14], and to contradict Moses and tell him to be quiet. Thus He lived entirely without any laws, and yet fulfilled all laws. He was both proud and obstinate against everything which would bind and take Him captive, and yet He was also, of His own self, useful and subject to all people.

29. However, the flaw is always that we can never genuinely learn this; rather, the devil is in the way and leads us to turn it around, so that we are only all too willing and submissive to listen to everything the Law says and to be frightened because of it, when we should be obstinate and not listen or

follow. On the other hand, outwardly we want to exercise our freedom all too much, when we should confidently afflict the body and train it with the Law, so that it has to suffer everything that gives it pain because it still continually sins. Thus sin remains outside, where it should remain, and has its Moses to knock it down and force it. Inwardly, however, no sin or law should rule, but Christ alone should rule with pure grace, joy, and comfort. Then everything would be right, and the man would be prepared for every good, both to do and to suffer everything with pleasure and a willing, cheerful heart, out of good, honest faith in the grace of God through Christ.

30. Now, whoever can, let him thank God and note that he does not know it too well nor presume that he has great skill. I and those like me do not yet know it as we should know it, even though we have attempted it most of all and worked at it for a long time. It is, as I have said, a skill which no one can do except the Christians, and they have to remain students and learn it all their lives. The exception is the other secure spirits, who can do everything themselves; however, even though they presume that they have this skill, they know nothing at all about it and thereby depart very far away from it. No more disagreeable thing or greater misery or harm happens to Christendom than through such sophists, through whom everything becomes full of factions and sects. They are people who serve neither God nor the world, and really listen to neither the Law nor the Gospel, but securely despise the former and become bored with the latter, and always seek some other teaching. However, we do not preach for their sake, since they are unworthy and are punished by God so that they never learn it or retain any of it, even if they do listen to it. Thus we alone retain it, and they take nothing from it, except that they hear the empty tone and sound of it.

That is the first part of what Christ teaches here with this Gospel reading. Now we want to look also at the beautiful preaching of the Lord, as He begins and says, "What man is there among you who has a hundred sheep and, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until he finds it?" etc. [Luke 15:4].⁵

II

31. He—the Lord Christ—is not only obstinate, so that He will not follow their teaching and mastery, but He also shows good reasons for this, refutes them with very excellent skill, and shuts them up, so that they have nothing to grumble against it. He even hems them in with their own actions and example so that they have to be ashamed in their hearts that they have

⁵ Luther's August 23, 1532, sermon ends here, and his sermon of August 24, 1532, begins with paragraph 31.

demanded this from Him and faulted Him in such great matters for what they themselves do in much smaller matters, and want to do so honorably.

32. How could He answer them better than to say: "You great masters and dear sophists, would you order and teach Me that I should repudiate the poor sinners who desire Me and come to Me in order to listen to Me? Yet you yourselves for the sake of one lost sheep do much more, if you miss a single one out of a hundred! You leave the ninety-nine standing alone in the wilderness (that is, in the field with the shepherds) and run after the one-hundredth and have no rest until you find it again. You call that well-done and a praiseworthy work; if anyone rebuked you for that, you would regard him to be mad and foolish. Should not I, the Savior of souls, do the same with people as you do with sheep, even though there is no comparison between a soul and everything that lives and moves of all the animals on earth [Acts 17:28]? Should you not, then, be ashamed in your hearts to fault and rebuke Me for such a work which is immeasurably better than the work which you yourselves praise and must praise? If you rebuke Me, then you must first condemn yourselves."

33. This is what it means to give a good answer, shut their mouths with all honor, and point out sufficient reasons why He does not at all need them to tell Him what to do—yes, He will not and should not tolerate it. They rush against Him, as is right, so that they obtain nothing but their own sin and shame. It truly is a shame to all masters, even an unbearable abomination, that they should dare to criticize the man who was made Master over all by God. It also happens (as I have said) that whoever wants to fault and judge a Christian, lead him away from his Baptism and the article about Christ, and govern him with his cleverness and laws not only has to become a fool but also causes abomination and murder. He desecrates God's temple and sanctuary and meddles with devilish wickedness in His kingdom, where He alone is to rule through His Holy Spirit. He fully deserves that God in turn should make him into sin and shame before all the world, because he wants to be a master in the devil's name where Christ alone is master, and butts his head against the man who is too high and wise for him.

34. This is why it is not good to make fun of Christians, for they are living saints, and let all the world have nothing to do with the man who is called Christ, since they gain no advantage over Him, and He will not tolerate that they should teach Him and tell Him what to do. So also a Christian cannot and should not tolerate it, for if he does tolerate it, and concedes and yields to such suggestions, in which people want to fault and criticize Christ in him or attack his faith with the Law and the teaching of works, then he is lost and has fallen away from Christ. Therefore, let us only cling to Him and not pay attention even if all the world outthinks us and tells us what to do, for if we

remain with Him and retain the true understanding of this article, then we will easily overcome and overthrow all such sophists. This Christ should not and will not let them rebuke Him and tell Him what to do. Rather, He alone will tell them what to do and rebuke all the world, so that they will either with His grace have to acknowledge Him as their Lord and Master, and themselves as fools, or with hostility be ruined and destroyed.

35. However, I have said before that this preaching is much too good, sweet, and comforting for the coarse, rough crowd and the mad, hardened rabble. We do not preach anything to them so that they will know it, but only to those who are in fright and anguish of conscience or in danger and peril of death, with whom the devil is disputing about their sins in order to push them into melancholy and despair. We should hold out this delightful picture to them, so that they will be comforted and cheerful. The others, however, who have previously lived riotously and know very little about melancholy and spiritual sadness, should be pointed to Moses and Master Hans⁶ and his servants, and then to the devil. This picture is too cheerful and much better than anyone can paint; no one is so eloquent that he can finish and capture it with words. Rather, it must be grasped (as much as possible) with faith in the heart. Nevertheless, we must point out a little of it, so that we give reason for meditating on it.

36. "I also have," He says, "a hundred sheep," that is, the flock of all Christendom, "one of whom is lost and gone out of the fellowship of Christendom. Now, if you want to know what My mind is like, then just depict well both such a shepherd and the lost sheep!"

37. That shepherd who is only a man and watches over the irrational animals which were created to be slain and butchered nevertheless has a heart for his lost sheep, so that he is just as anxious to get the sheep back as the sheep itself is to find its shepherd. When the sheep understands (as it naturally does) that he is its shepherd, it is not at all afraid of him, but runs to him with all confidence and goes on before him with complete trust. Yes, as soon as it only hears his voice, it bleats and runs after him and has no rest until he comes to it. Thus there naturally is nothing but friendship and love between them both; yes, there is one heart and mind toward each other. If the sheep could speak and pour out its heart, it would desire nothing but its shepherd. On the other hand, the shepherd has no other care or plan than how he can again find the sheep which has gone away from him and strayed. He runs and sends out servants wherever he thinks to seek it, and does not cease until he has found it and brought it home.

He certainly knows what a weak animal it is, which must live only with the shepherd's help and protection and cannot at all help itself. Rather, it must

6 *meister Hansen*, i.e., the executioner.

be completely lost and perish if it does not have its shepherd. Besides, it is naturally fearful and inclined to stray. As soon as it loses its way and leaves the shepherd, it is already over, and it cannot endure, even if it comes to other shepherds and sheep and a stranger calls to it. Rather, it runs a course through hedges, water, and whatever it comes to, until it falls prey to the wolf or otherwise perishes.

38. On the other hand, however, it has the virtue and good nature of clinging with all diligence to its shepherd and knowing his voice very well. When it hears that voice, it runs straight to him and will not let itself be pointed away from him, even if all the world should call and coax. Even if it is lost or straying, it still has the hope—as much as its nature gives it—that if only it again hears its shepherd, it will be cheerful and lose all care. The shepherd also is not there to be angry with it when he finds it again, or reject it or toss it into the wolf's jaws; rather, all his cares and plans are only to coax it in the most friendly way and treat it in the gentlest way: he takes it on his own back, lifts, and carries it, until he brings it home again.

39. That is the picture painted in this creature, through which Christ wants to show us what His mind-set is, what He does for us, and what we are to expect from Him. While this is true in nature, it is much more so in the kingdom of Christ, which is a kingdom of grace and nothing but love and consolation. Therefore, let this sheep which belongs to this shepherd stand for you, and you will find how much more and higher an interest He takes in it and how very sincerely and cheerfully He cares for it, in order to restore it. In this way He wants to amplify and even pour out His unsearchable love and ardor toward the poor, sinful, frightened, and timid consciences, which are His true sheep.

40. When someone has lost this Shepherd and does not hear His voice, then what happens to him is just like the lost sheep, which always goes farther and farther away from Him. Even when people coax it and call to it with other teachings, so that it runs over and thinks it is coming to its Shepherd, yet it does not find Him. Rather, it always runs from one corner to another, and strays more and more. It has no comfort or relief until it again hears the sound of its true Shepherd's voice, as experience plainly shows and as each one can experience in his heart. When the article about Christ is taken away or not emphasized, then here there comes a sectarian, there a fanatic; here one perverts the Sacrament, another perverts Baptism; one preaches this, the other something else about special holiness; and each one coaxes the poor sheep to himself and pretends to be the Shepherd. The sheep goes more and more astray until it loses its way entirely.

41. Then the devil comes along with his own thoughts which he forces onto the heart: "If only you had done or not done this and that!" This only

makes the heart more flighty and stray more, so that it does not know where it will be. This certainly happens when Christ is out of our sight and this article is not heard. No matter what people teach, advise, or point out, it only becomes worse and comes closer to destruction, unless the true Shepherd again comes to him with His own voice.

42. Therefore, we should now learn to know and think about our Lord Christ correctly, so that we do not regard Him to be a tyrant or an angry judge (as people have previously preached about Him and as the devil always presents Him to the heart), as if He stands behind us with a sword. Rather, [we should regard Him] as the sheep naturally regards its shepherd, not at all as one who wants to frighten, hunt, and strike it down, but as soon as it sees him, it becomes happy, obtains hope as if it has already been delivered, no longer needs to fear or worry, but at once runs to him with all confidence.

43. Thus if we are to begin to be confident, strengthened, and comforted, then we must learn to recognize our Shepherd's voice well and to abandon all other voices, which only lead us astray, hunt us, and drive us back and forth. We should listen to and grasp only the article that Christ presents to us as kindly and comfortingly as it can ever be painted. Then we can say with full confidence: "My Lord Jesus Christ is truly the only Shepherd, and I, unfortunately, am the lost sheep which has run astray. I am fearful and anxious, and would gladly be righteous and have a gracious God and peace in my conscience. Now I hear that He is as anxious about me as I am about Him. I am anxious and distraught about how I can come to Him to be delivered. He is anxious and concerned and desires nothing else than to bring me again to Himself."

44. If we could paint His heart in that way, and imprint on our hearts that He has such overflowing longing, anxiety, and desire for us, then we could not be horrified or afraid of Him, but would cheerfully run to Him, stay with Him alone, and listen to no other teaching or master. Wherever a different teaching comes in, whether it is Moses or something else, it certainly does nothing else than hunt and afflict us, so that we can have neither rest nor peace. That is why Christ says: "Come to Me, all who are laboring and burdened. I will revive you. Take My yoke on you, and you will find rest for your souls," etc. (Matthew 11 [:28-29]). It is as if He meant to say: "Run and seek wherever you want, hear and learn everything people can preach, but you will find no rest or peace of heart except in Me alone."

45. We are glad to have preaching about a good life, the Ten Commandments, and all kinds of teaching. However, when it comes to preaching to the conscience which is stuck in anxiety and fright over its sins, then on your life no other words should sound forth except about Christ. The poor, lost sheep neither should nor can have and tolerate any master except

this, its only Shepherd, who does not at all deal with it by the Law's urging and requiring, but handles it in the sweetest and gentlest way; He takes the sheep with all its need, sin, and anxiety onto Himself, and Himself does what the sheep is supposed to do, as we will hear further.

46. Here we must clearly distinguish (as I have sufficiently said before) between the two kinds of preaching, that is, between Moses' voice and Christ's voice, so that on your life no Moses—even on his best day—be allowed to come to the lost sheep. Perhaps they want to cook these two together and comfort a troubled conscience with the Law in this way: "Be of good cheer. You have not murdered or committed adultery and done coarse things—or at least you meant it well," etc. This is also a comfort, but it does not last long, and it cannot sustain the blows. This means to be comforted no further and no higher than by yourself; in that way, no poor sheep is delivered, for, despite all that, it remains astray and lost, and it cannot help itself nor come to its Shepherd.

47. However, if it is to be delivered, it must be shown the genuine Shepherd, who comes and seeks it so that He can bring it back, and let His voice be heard. Then it can receive genuine comfort, so that it dares to answer Moses and say: "I now no longer respect either your comfort or fright, no matter how bad you can make it, even if you make me into a murderer time and again and say that I hanged my father and mother. Now, however, just because I am in anguish and fright before God's wrath and eternal damnation, I will not listen to you nor follow you. I feel and confess myself that I am, unfortunately, a poor lost sheep. But my salvation and comfort on which I rely is that I have the Shepherd who Himself seeks me, His lost sheep, and carries me on His back. Let us not dispute about how righteous or wicked I am, but about how I can come to Christ."

48. That is why we must always preach according to how the people are. I have said that this teaching is not good for a coarse, obstinate person, just as it is unprofitable to give a rough thresher sugar and costly tonics, which are suitable for the sick, but you should give him a good piece of hard bread and cheese and a drink of water. Other soft and dainty food can be saved for the sick or young children, who cannot digest anything hard. Thus you also must take care that you rightly divide it and give to each one his due, like a wise householder [Luke 12:42]. Thus you should retain Moses and the preaching of the Law until you find hard, wicked people, who live securely without fear. Let them eat only rough thresher food; that is, let them hear angry Moses, who sends thunder and lightning down from Mount Sinai, who slays the children of Israel and destroys them in the wilderness, who drowns King Pharaoh in the Red Sea, etc.

49. Wherever there are distressed, weak hearts and consciences, which have now become lost sheep, keep quiet about Moses and all the works of God done in the Law. Speak only about the works done through Christ at the time of grace, and impress on the poor conscience how He acts toward the lost sheep, namely, that He is the dear Good Shepherd who is so anxious and concerned about the sheep that He forgets everything else, if only He can bring it back, and does not cease until He brings it home. He regrets that someone is stuck, distressed, and despondent in sin; He cannot tolerate that he should remain in sin and perish. Rather, He coaxes you with His Gospel in the kindest way, so that you come to Him and let Him take and carry you on His shoulders and call you His dear sheep.

50. You must not give the name "lost sheep" to the crowd that lives in security, riotously, unconcerned about whether God above is angry or laughs, like a wild goat that will not let itself be protected or restrained. Rather, those people are called "straying, lost sheep" whose sins oppress them and who struggle in faith, where the question is not about losing Moses but about losing Christ and His chief article, that is, where the conscience is worried and anxious about whether or not God is gracious to him. This is the true sheep which sighs and cries for its Shepherd and wants to be delivered, as David says, "I am like a straying and lost sheep, Lord; seek Your servant," etc. (Psalm 119 [:176]). To them, sugar and this pleasantly sweet tonic taste good, and by it the heart is revived so that it does not fall into despair, but rises again through this comfort, which is not in Moses but in Christ. It is not that he has Moses as his friend or can quiet him, but that he has a gracious God in his Lord Christ, no matter if Moses remains with his comfort or not.

51. Nevertheless, it is also good and should happen that people do not live against the Law, rob, steal, murder, or wrong and harm his neighbor. However, such a life does not produce genuine comfort in the heart, but only scratches the hide and does not penetrate or remain. When the devil comes and attacks the heart, then he takes all comfort away. If you have even perhaps done right, he brings easily ten times as much against it; yes, he can easily find much that is impure in the very best works and turn everything into sin.

Therefore, nothing is to be built on such comfort, but only boldly take it away and say: "No matter whether I am righteous or not, I will defer this to the place where we are to teach and deal with works. However, in the circle in which I am now standing, there is no value in dealing with my works and righteousness, but only with Christ and His works, which He does for me as His lost sheep. If you now want to ask whether I am righteous, then I will simply answer: 'No, and I also do not want to be in this circle.'"

52. However, if you ask whether Christ is righteous, then I can say "Yes!" without any doubt and present Him as my righteousness and appeal to Him boldly. I was baptized upon Him, and in the Gospel I have the seal and letter that I am His dear sheep, and He is the good and righteous Shepherd who seeks His lost sheep and deals with me entirely without the Law. He demands nothing from me, neither drives, threatens, nor frightens, but only shows me sweet grace. He stoops down, takes me on Himself, so that I can lie on His back and be carried. Why, then, would I be afraid of Moses' and the devil's frightening and thundering? I am in the protection of the man who gives His godliness and everything He has to be my own, who carries me and keeps me so that I cannot be lost, because I remain a sheep and do not deny the Shepherd or shamefully fall away from Him.

53. Thus you have the picture presented in the most pleasant way it can ever be painted. However, it is only dealing with faith. The picture is certainly good and comforting and is the genuine truth. However, it is lacking in that we do not sense it as we ought to sense it. When the sheep runs astray—that is, when man senses his sins oppressing him, does not know where to turn, and the devil terrifies him—then he finds only the opposite and cannot grasp that it is true; all that he has heard here entirely escapes him because of his present feelings and experience. The devil has corrupted his vision so that he senses nothing but God's wrath and hostility, by which his heart is so burdened that he cannot rise above it or turn his eyes away from it. Yes, he has sunk so deeply into it that in Christ he sees nothing else than an angry Judge—as He has previously been painted and forced into all hearts by the shameful Papists—sitting alone on the rainbow with a sword in His mouth [cf. Rev. 4:3].⁷

54. The devil's real skill and villainy, which he uses against the poor straying sheep, is to pervert this picture and put such a deception before its eyes that it can no longer recognize its Shepherd. Under the name of Christ he leads the person under Moses, so that he disputes about Christ as he did before with Moses. He certainly needs a strong faith that it is true, and the man must first of all contend with himself about it. His perception is strong in and of itself, and then the devil makes sin and fright so great that one's innermost being and the heart in the body could vanish.

55. Therefore, it is not too soon to learn how we should think about this. When there is peace, it is easy to believe that Christ is delightfully kind. However, when anxiety and fright come along and overwhelm the heart, then the person is blind and straying, only wants to judge things according to his heart and perceptions, persists in it, and becomes confirmed in his

⁷ Medieval art often depicted Christ in judgment seated upon a rainbow, based on Rev. 4:3 and Ezek. 1:28. See LW 22:222 n. 12.

error. He is caught in it and cannot think otherwise than that it is so—and yet it is not true.

56. It would now be real skill if he could say to his own heart: "When you acknowledge that you are a lost sheep, you are correct. However, when you want to run away from Him because of it, and when you imagine that He is the man who wants to chase and frighten you, then that is the devil himself. If you would look at Him correctly and recognize Him as your true Shepherd, you would not be afraid or frightened of Him, but rather run to Him with joy and confidence. He is not there because He wants to condemn you, but He comes to you and seeks you so that He can carry you on His back and deliver and redeem you from sin, error, the devil's power, and every misfortune.

"If you now feel that you are a sinner and have deserved God's wrath, then you should just for that reason all the more cry out and run to the dear Shepherd so that He delivers you from it. You should not think about Him any differently than the sheep does about its shepherd; it cannot be afraid of him, but is cheerful and confident as soon as it sees and hears him, even if it has run away from him and according to merit would have reason to fear him. However, it knows well that he bears no wrath or hostility toward the sheep, and can expect from him nothing but love and everything good."

57. Thus here also everything depends on learning to look correctly only at Christ according to the Word, and not according to your own thoughts and perceptions. Human thoughts are false and lies, but His Word is true and cannot lie. He has also demonstrated this with living deeds and examples, and still daily demonstrates it in all Christendom. That is why we must only press the Word into our hearts, knit ourselves into it, and learn the skill of calling our own hearts liars, and set this article against it. However, this is a skill which I do not have—but the other thoughtless spirits much less, who boast much about it as if they could do everything, if they have only heard of it once—and yet they never taste or experience anything of it. It is easy to speak and preach about it, but it is difficult to demonstrate it in reality; those who take a serious interest in this easily experience it.

58. So that is the first sign of the delightful Christ, painted by Himself in this Gospel reading, in which He so pours out His heart and is so anxious about the sheep that He runs after it alone, apart from the ninety-nine, not because He wants to frighten or hit it but so that He can deliver it, bring it back home, and gladden the miserable, sad heart and conscience with His kind, sweet voice. Thus there is on both sides nothing but sincere love and joy in each other, so that you see how you are very kind and pleasing to Him, when you cling to Him with your whole heart and expect everything good from Him.

59. Second, you see how He pours out His joy and inexpressible goodness with all kinds of external signs and gestures; for example, He is kind when He has found the sheep. He does not at all deal with it by means of some laws or force, even though He has the right to drive it before Him like the other sheep or leave it alone. Rather, He goes ahead and puts it on His shoulders and carries it Himself the whole way through the wilderness. He takes all the work and trouble onto Himself, so that only the sheep has rest and ease; He does this gladly from the heart and is even full of joy that He has it back again. But then look also at how good this is for the dear sheep, how it lies in all peace and safety on the Shepherd's back, and is happy to lie there so softly, and does not need to walk, safe and without care both from dogs and wolves, that is, from all error and lies, danger and destruction. This certainly is a cheerful painting, excellent, delightful, and comforting to look at.

60. Our Lord Christ does just the same when He redeems us, which He once did bodily in His suffering and dying; now, however, He continually does this powerfully and spiritually through His Word. Thus He puts us on His shoulders, carries and protects us, so that we are safe from all the danger of sin, the devil, and death, even though they frighten us and appear to want to tear us away and devour us. His carrying us means that we get better and remain safe from all misfortune and do not need to fear anything, just like the sheep which lies on the shepherd's back and is not attacked, even though the dogs bark in hostility and the wolf slinks about; rather, the sheep drops its head without any care and sleeps.

So we also, if we stand and remain with faith in this article: "I believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who suffered for us, died, and rose again, etc.,"⁸ need not worry that we will be lost or that the devil can devour us, even though he opens his jaws wide, etc. Then we are not on our own path, and do not walk with our own feet, but cling to the neck of our dear Shepherd and lie on His back, where we are entirely safe. Even though sin, death, and hell are certainly wicked and frightening, they must certainly never devour Him; otherwise we poor sheep would soon be lost and destroyed.

61. Similarly, the sheep cannot protect or provide for itself so that it does not go astray, if the shepherd does not always direct and lead it. If it does go astray and is lost, it cannot find itself again nor return to its shepherd. Rather, the shepherd himself must go after it and seek it a long time until he finds it. When he has found it, he takes it and carries it on his back, so that it is not again frightened away from him, hunted or caught by the wolf.

So also we can neither help nor aid ourselves, so that we can have rest and peace of conscience and escape the devil, death, and hell, if Christ does

⁸ See the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed (Kolb-Wengert, pp. 21-22; *Concordia*, p. 16).

not Himself bring us back and call us to Himself through His Word. If we do come to Him and do believe, we still cannot keep ourselves in faith or pass the test, if He Himself does not always lift and carry us through this same Word and power, because the devil everywhere and without ceasing lies in wait for us and prowls around about us "like a roaring lion" (as St. Peter says [1 Pet. 5:8]) to devour us. Thus here it is completely wrong to boast about free will or powers, neither to begin nor to continue and persist; rather, Christ, our Shepherd, alone must do everything.

62. Now, however, we are certain that as long as we lie on Christ's back, we will remain safe from all fright and misfortune. He will, of course, not let us be torn from His neck nor thrown from Him, because He is so cheerful and of good courage that He has the sheep back and can bring it to the rest of the flock. In short, there is no fright, force, or demanding, but only cheerful carrying and only the life of grace, by which He cares most tenderly for His sheep. On the other hand, Moses was not like a shepherd of poor, weak sheep, but of rough, strong cattle, as he drove his herd ahead of him with his staff and rod three days' journey into the wilderness until they were tired [Exod. 3:1; 15:22]. That is proper for hard, rough people.

63. We also, when we come under Moses—namely, according to the flesh and external life—must ourselves go and do what the Law demands. However, according to our faith we are not to tolerate anyone forcing a work on us or requiring it from us, but only let ourselves be carried and lifted up most easily, not on horse and wagon, but lying on His own back and shoulders. As I have said, this happens when He sends the preaching of His Word to us, that He died for us and on the cross was carrying our sins in His body, has put the devil along with death and sin under His feet, and has led us into eternal life. He always carries us as long as we live, so that we need not look at how righteous our life is and how strong we are, but only lie on His shoulders. In this circle or article we need not be concerned about any sin, death, or life; rather, we have everything in Christ, who carries and preserves us.

64. Now, He does not have enough in these two points—that He so kindly seeks the lost sheep and carries it so gently and joyfully—but when He brings it home He also prepares an especially joyous feast and calls together His neighbors and friends so that they can rejoice with Him. Yes, He makes it so large that God in heaven together with all the heavenly hosts, and all creatures with them, rejoice over one poor sinner who repents [Luke 15:7]. By this He points out and explains who He calls His lost sheep, namely, one sinner who repents, that is, who feels his sins and is sincerely sorry for them; he would gladly be freed from them, come to Christ, and amend his life, also outwardly. That is what it means to have a miserably sorrowful heart and a battered conscience, which the devil attacks so that it might sink into pain

and sorrow. He is also the kind of man who does not seek or carry a sheep unless it is lost and knows of no aid or help in itself.

65. Now look, how could He preach more kindly and comfortingly? Or what more should He do to make the heart cheerful and awaken a strong confidence in Him? We see such a shepherd, which He Himself paints for us poor sinners, a shepherd who so reluctantly loses his sheep and seeks it so ardently, and when he finds it carries it with all joy and spreads this joy so that all angels and saints—yes, all creatures—rejoice and kindly smile with him over us, that even the sun must shine more sweetly. It naturally happens that when someone is sorrowful, even the sun and everything he sees looks gloomy to him. On the other hand, when the heart is cheerful, then he looks even more cheerful, and all things appear brighter and clearer to him.

66. Now, whoever could firmly believe this would also receive genuine comfort and joy in and through the Lord Christ, because he has here the certain promise that if he clings thus to Christ and lets himself be carried on His shoulders, then he is a dear guest in the kingdom of heaven and will be received with all joy.

67. However, the sorrow and depression of the conscience feel much different, when the heart can think nothing else than that every angel stands behind him with a drawn sword, so that he can obtain joy neither from God nor from angels. Some in this condition cannot look at any creature with joy, are afraid of the sun itself, and even of every rustling leaf. All of this is because they bite and devour themselves with their own thoughts. They would gladly get out of this and would work hard to feel that they were righteous so that they would not need to be afraid—but in that way they only make the evil worse.

68. However, if you would obtain genuine comfort and joy in your heart, then just learn to be impressed with this delightful picture and Word of this Gospel, so that you seek it where it is to be sought, namely, in Christ and nowhere else. In this man you find everything, if only you remain under His protection and on His shoulders. However, whatever comfort can be sought apart from Him does not enter the heart, even if you had the help of all creatures and had in one place all the world's joy and pleasure.