



The 3rd Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer, 2021

Today is about who we *'hang out'* with.

The company you keep isn't just about being seen in Soho House at the *right* table, with the *right* people – it actually *forms* you we are and who we are becoming.

So today Jesus is once again the Good Shepherd, seeking the lost sheep. So if we are seeking God, seeking Jesus (which is after all the very point of life, the true heart of all our seeking and living and loving. The true heart of all our desires – manifested in a million and one outward ways) if at the heart of life we are seeking God and all that God is seeking to give us, then where should we look?

Today's parable provides an obvious and straightforward answer.

We are to look amongst the lost sheep, because that is where God will be – that’s what Jesus tells us.

We should place ourselves amongst the lonely, the lost, the outcast, despised and overlooked and there – with them – God will be, and He will find us and we Him. If we want to keep company with God, now and forever in heaven, we need to keep company with the lost sheep. Who are the people in your life, in your community, in your corner of the vineyard (whatever that looks like) who are lost, lonely and despised, who Jesus longs to find you amongst?

Talking of the company we keep, today also features the ‘*other* guy’. St Peter tells us in today’s Epistle that the devil is prowling round like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He is trying to hang out with us, to form us and make us one of *his* friends. And isn’t that always the case? Opportunities to get it wrong are always there, waiting just within reach... So what are we to make of the devil, the father of lies?

My default (and I commend it to you) is (ironically enough as we talk about him) to *not* give him air time. The devil is a spent joke. The death of Jesus, His harrowing (abolishing) of hell and His Resurrection from the dead have done that. The devil is to be ignored as the nonsense that he is. Some people are rather over-fond of speaking of him, making him a thing – it's all deeply unhelpful. The Harry Potter fans amongst us have the right track to follow. Do you remember the Bogart? A nasty creature who hides in wardrobes and things and when the door is opened out comes the Bogart – a shape shifter – who always appears as the person's worst nightmare. It could be a giant spider, or monster, or loneliness or humiliation or whatever: your worst nightmare. What the Bogart hates most, and simply cannot handle? To be laughed at. Indeed the spell to cast a Bogart away is 'ridiculus' – to see it for what it is: a ridiculous and bad taste joke. So too the devil. Prowling and roaring he may be – but he's a bad joke that's gone off, and the best thing we can do is ignore him

completely, and when he does rear his head, dismiss him with 'ha!'. In fact, one of the monks I trained under – when he found himself (which was more often than you might think...) having evil thoughts about his brethren would turn to the corner of the room and stick his tongue out at the devil as if her were crouching there. Sending him and his evil schemes on their way, with a slap on the behind.

Who's company will you keep? If you are seeking to keep company with the source of life? With the one who made all things and loves every tiny part of you and me and all that has been made, the source of the waters of life and goodness and peace? (And if you're not, then frankly you may need a better plan...) then, it turns out we need to find the lost sheep and love and wait and dwell and learn with them until the Shepherd comes again, because with them is where He's headed.