

Hold on one sec. I just got a text... What? You sick of seeing kids on their phone all the time? Do you ever feel like today's youth are hopeless? There are all kinds of articles out there that say this new generation is narcissistic, entitled, lazy, all that stuff.

But is that really true? There are actually a number studies and statistics that say that the new generation really isn't all that different from the previous generations. Some have even said that older folks talk about kids these days in much the same way your grandparents talked about your generation. Could it be that there is hope for the next generation? Could it be that we are unfairly judging these people to be lost?

Why do we do this? Why do we categorize whole groups of people and then simply deem them lost, hopeless? It is always dangerous to believe a lie, because lies lead us to reject what God says about people. Lies lead us to adopt a point of view that Satan wants us to have. Today, our God urges us to be aware of Satan's schemes. Today, our God encourages us to Reaffirm our Love for the Lost. The Lost are Not a Lost Cause!

Look again at our gospel lesson. See how our God so deeply wants to save the lost! In Luke, chapter 15, Jesus beautifully illustrates how he wants everyone, EVERYONE to be saved, especially the lost, especially the hopeless, especially sinners. When one person falls away, Jesus doesn't simply say, "Well, at least I've still got this group here who believes in me." No! He goes after that lost one until they are found.

Do we, as Christ's church, have that same love for the lost? Do we have the same joy to see the lost ones found? Jesus wants his church to love the lost like he does. So do we?

Every time we come to church, we get to hear the gospel message. And that is Satan's nightmare. In the gospel message, which is the power of God for salvation for everyone, anyone who believes; in that gospel message and in God's Word, we have the one thing that Satan is powerless to fight.

For that reason, Satan has been working nonstop for thousands and thousands of years to make sure that we do not share that message. Satan has been working hard to be sure that we see the lost as a lost cause.

And Satan accomplishes two things when he does that. 1. The lost remain lost. God has given us the gospel message and he wants us to share it. But when we see any group of people, whether that's the poor or the rich, drug addicts or a goodie-two shoes, the young or the old, or even someone to whom we've already spoken about the gospel, when we see anyone as a lost cause, we don't reach out to them with the gospel. If the lost never hear the gospel message, then there is nothing to stop Satan from rampaging and ruling their lives.

And the second thing Satan accomplishes when he gets us to view the lost as a lost cause: is that we, here, become lost ourselves. When we view others as lost causes, we are not looking at people the way God tells us to. We don't see the basic similarity that we all share: that we are all lost and condemned sinners who desperately need to hear what God has done for us in Christ!

And if we are not believing what God says, we are believing what Satan has told us. Instead of seeing the similarity, we start to believe that we are somehow different from the lost. Instead of recognizing that God has miraculously created faith in our hearts, we start to believe that we have somehow done something to earn God's love, something that *those people* haven't. At that point, we are trusting in ourselves, and by doing that we reject salvation in Christ alone.

Do you see the spiritual damage this does? Suddenly, instead of coming to church to hear the all-powerful gospel message, we simply come to church to stroke our egos. Suddenly, instead of going to God's Word to strengthen our faith in the fact that God loves us because of what Jesus has done, we read to prove to ourselves how much better we are than those lost causes. Suddenly, instead of coming to God for his life-giving Word, WE become the lost. WE become the lost cause.

Friends, this is just one of Satan's many schemes. Today in our lesson from 2nd Corinthians, God through the apostle Paul wants to warn us about Satan's plans; plans to make all of us lost. In God's Word, however, all of Satan's plans fall apart. As we read Paul, we see very clearly that the Lost, whether us here today or anyone out there who is not with us; the Lost are Not a Lost Cause! In 2nd Corinthians,

chapter 2, Paul is speaking to the church about someone whom the church had to discipline. This person had previously been excommunicated, so serious was his sin. That was certainly someone who was lost, someone who could be seen as a lost cause.

But look at how Paul speaks throughout this section. Notice how gentle his voice is. He says, *“IF anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent — not to put it too severely.”* Do you see how mildly Paul speaks about this person’s sin? Remember, this was someone who’s sin was so serious that the church had to excommunicate him! But Paul continues, *“What I have forgiven — if there is anything to forgive — I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake.”* This had been a person whom the church had previously condemned, but now Paul speaks about it almost like there wasn’t even anything to forgive! How can Paul speak so lightly of so serious a sin?

It is because in Christ, the Lost are Not a Lost Cause! Jesus has fully taken away all our sins. Jesus has forgiven all of our sins, whether we have sinned while sitting in church or we have sinned while avoiding church! Jesus has forgiven all our sins, whether we sinned while outwardly doing what we are supposed to do or while openly living in rebellion against God!

We, though we were lost, are not a lost cause! Jesus has forgiven us so thoroughly, so completely, that it is as if our sins, even our grossest unfaithfulness to God, it is as if those sins were no big deal. Though all of our sins earn us eternity in hell, by Jesus’ death, our sins are paid for completely. Through Jesus, our sins no longer have any power to condemn us. Through Jesus, our sins no longer have any ability to take us away from our God. No matter how unfaithful we have been, no matter how lost, Jesus seeks us out. And every time any one of us repents, there is a celebration like you cannot even imagine going on in heaven.

Dear friends, the Lost are Not a Lost Cause, whether we are talking about ourselves here today or those people out there. The Lost are Not a Lost Cause. Therefore, let us not fall for Satan’s schemes! Instead, let us reaffirm our love even for the lost. Do not write anyone off because there is always hope. If God can save someone as lost as me, he can save you. If God can save people like us, he can save anyone!

As Christ's church, let us follow his example. Even when we must condemn someone for their sins, our motive must always be love for that lost person; love and hope that our efforts on God's behalf will bring them back to God. When we must point out someone's sins to them, Satan plots to get us to feel pride, but God reminds us that we are just as lost. We need Jesus just as much as that person. God reminds us that we are saved only by God's undeserved love for us shown in Jesus. Therefore, we want to see the lost saved because we, ourselves, have been miraculously and undeservedly saved! We ourselves were lost but now are found! Oh, that we might see more of the lost found!

Dear friends, reaffirm your love for the lost, because the Lost are Not a Lost Cause. We should have been lost, but Jesus found us. In the world all around us, we know people who are lost, people who are trapped by addictions, people who have fallen away from the faith, people who even attack Christianity, but our God does not believe these people to be lost causes. And neither do we.

Dear friends, heaven rejoices over each of us who repent. Therefore, let us all repent and reaffirm our love for the lost, because Christ reaffirms his love for us and for everyone else who still needs him. Amen.