

Once my grandfather gave me a penny, copper, not very shiny. But it was like no other penny I had ever seen. For it was a flying eagle cent. Stamped upon it was the date, 1857. Though the coin collectors book indicated it to be worth a dollar or so, I prized this penny ~~like none my friends had ever seen.~~

I had a bank in which I kept my not so prized coins. It looked like a can of Sohio Oil. To open it a ~~lid~~ cover was pried off the bottom. One day in a hurry, I grabbed a penny in my drawer, used it to pry off the cover on my bank. Off popped the lid, but in my fingers was ~~not~~ my flying eagle cent. Scratched, marred. Carelessly I had taken what was precious and used it as if it meant nothing to me.

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, to stumble it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

Do you hear how precious you are to Jesus? I do every time I hear that warning. Jesus is saying to me that he will take a great millstone and wrap it around my neck, throw me into the sea, if I cause you, his little ones to stumble. In my work as pastor he has entrusted to me, that which he prizes most, you. You are his treasure. He wants me never to forget that.

Nor does he want you to forget that. And so gives you this warning: If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with ~~two~~ hand to ~~go~~ to Gehenna, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to ~~sin~~ stumble, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

You noticed that I read this passage using the word stumble, for that is what is in the Greek, and instead of the word hell, the word Gehenna, for that also is what the text says.



If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, your foot, cut it off, your eye, pluck it out. Better to give up even that which you think you could not do without than to be trash, thrown into hell.

I could hand out a piece of paper to you all right now. Write down the causes of your stumbling, whatever leads you to sin, away from God, toward emptiness, worthlessness. Most of us would have no difficulty identifying the problem.

Then remove it from your life. Put it aside, give it up. And many of us would find that it is easier to pluck out an eye than to give up worry and doubt and fear. Easier to cut off a hand than to face the emptiness and loneliness within. Easier to chop off a foot than to walk without the crutches that we use to get us through the day.

~~Stumbling. Stumbling and falling right into the dump, by ourselves that's where we're headed. God's precious coins are being scratched and marred and spoiled that his image is spoiled upon us in the generation is no longer possible upon us.~~

~~With his grace with the confession and with the grace of Christ we can all be scratched and marred by our sin, our weakness, our image.~~

~~Some take the name of Jesus, call themselves Christians, but deny the name of Christ, give us the name of Christ, but deny the name of Christ.~~

Into our stumbling world, God has sent his Son. We cannot change ourselves, make ourselves shiny and new. We cannot overcome the causes of stumbling, but Christ can. In his dying and rising he has perfected our cleansing, our renewing. He stamps us with his image, we are his coin, precious beyond price, through his cleansing without us even the slightest scratch.

Yes, into our stumbling world, God has sent his son, ~~and we have seen~~ that what is precious to him not belost, but saved for eternity.

~~Today is American Mission Sunday within the ELCA. In churches across our~~

This is the mission of the church, to see that all who are precious to God are saved for eternity. This mission begins with me, with you. Do not settle for stumbling, Jesus says. Do not let yourself be lost.

This mission goes beyond ourselves to our nearest neighbors. Mother, Father, son, daughter, husband wife, they also are precious to God, his treasure coins. Do not cause thier stubbling, they are far more precious to God than any and all things.

This mission extends to this family of faith, each minted, stamped in the image of Christ. Each to be treated with gentleness, tenderness, care.

This mission reaches into our community, to all we see each day. No matter how scratched and marred, no matter how broken and battered and used by life, Christ wants them for his own. His will is that not one be thrown into the trash to be delávered to hell. Not one.

This mission reaches to places we have not been, to people we have no t met. To Kenton, to our Savior's Lutheran church. Through our gifts we become partners with them in ministry.

This mission reaches into all the world.

There is a word from Jesus that I want each of us to take with us this morning. Not the threat of the millstone, no~~t~~ the threat of Gehenna, the garbage heap. Rather a promise: For truly I say to you, whoever gives~~x~~ you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose <sup>his</sup> ~~whi~~ reward. Such a little thing, a cup of water. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ But you are so precious to the Almighty God, that he will remeber for eternity, even the smalle~~t~~ kindness another does for you, his child in Chirst.