

Sermon Notes Jeff Greathouse Sept. 11th, 2022

Sermon Text: Luke 15:1-10

Scripture, Via “The Message”

1-3 By this time a lot of men and women of questionable reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, “He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends.” Their grumbling triggered this story.

4-7 “Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Celebrate with me! I’ve found my lost sheep!’ Count on it—there’s more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.

8-10 “Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she’ll call her friends and neighbors: ‘Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!’ Count on it—that’s the kind of party God’s angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.”

The Sermon

The Pharisees and the scholars were not happy with Jesus, once again. Their displeasure with him caused them to grumble. They could not believe that Jesus would continue his association with sinners. They believed that the behavior of Jesus was inappropriate.

So, their grumble and complaint to him was the following:

He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends

With these words, they made it perfectly clear that they had no intention to exhibit hospitality to those who were considered to be an outsider. In their minds, there was no need for a generous attitude toward those who they regraded to the status of “lost.”

These words and their attitude are what prompted Jesus into the three parables. He gives them three stories that were connected. *The parables included: The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin* and the Lost Son. This morning, the lectionary gives us the first two parables.

In these parables, Jesus counters their attitudes and restrictiveness. The words of Jesus demonstrated God’s care for those who are despised and rejected by society. If you take one thing away today from these two stories, may it be the following:

God’s purpose is to restore the lost.

There is no doubt about it. We can be assured that God diligently searches and scours for what is lost. Just like the shepherd pursued the sheep and the women searched for the coin, that is what God does for and to humanity.

One of the words that came out of our Tuesday morning bible study was determination. The shepherd and the woman both were determined to find what they had lost. God, in Jesus Christ, has come to seek out and save the lost. This theological statement is what Donald McKim calls God’s divine initiative.

There are four important themes that arise to us when we listen in to what God has done for humanity in Christ. They are the following:

- (1) Salvation
- (2) Reconciliation
- (3) Forgiveness of Sin
- (4) Peace with God

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Back in the first century, Jesus shared these parables because the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling and he wanted to share with them some good news, even if they initially did not see it as good news.

Here we are 2,000 years later. As we look around our nation, we can see that there are many individuals and groups that have this same disdain. We have just snuck into the month of September and if you turn on your television or have your radio on, it won't take long for you to hear a political ad and many times, they are grumbling about the opponent that they are facing or the political party that they are competing against.

It seems like everyone can find a reason to grumble about someone. Sometimes, they are debates regarding immigration, people of other races, gay marriages or in our current economic times, why are there so many help-wanted signs; doesn't anyone want to work? Then, it can be heated but light-hearted debates on whether the WR's for the Packers will be able to step up this year.

When we take a look at much of the grumbling today and back in the days of Jesus, much of the reason for the disapproval of the other is about *identity and beliefs*.

I am only fifty years young, so those with longer memories could probably share better than me that tolerance and goodwill has largely disappeared. I remember hearing stories that in the good ole days when members of Congress would disagree over a bill but after the debate ended would still go out together for a meal. This was not just the case within the political walls but within the walls of the church. In church circles, there were fierce debates about theological issues. Even though individuals disagreed, they still gathered. There seems to be a dramatic shift.

In the political world, people threaten to leave, exclude or bring out filibuster measures. In the church world, after contested debates and decisions, churches and even denominations, split. Little is accomplished for the good or the whole.

However, the grumbling is not always just in the realm of politics and religious opponents. Instead, sometimes, the grumbling is targeted at those who "sin" is different. The word different can sometimes be equated to those who are inferior or dangerous. Sometimes, the grumbling is geared to the individuals that we do not feel deserve certain benefits. I agree with Lynn Lapinga when she asks the following question:

What is it about human nature that makes us grumble when something good happens to someone else?

Maybe, we can be like the shepherd and the woman and we can celebrate God's goodness to others. When we think of the shepherd and the woman and then the lost sheep and the lost coin; maybe it could prompt us to ask the question: Who is the Lost? What is our responsibility in "pursuing" the lost? Can we rejoice when the lost come back?

Thankfully, in our bible study on Tuesday, they shared that they could not imagine having resentment when the "lost" came back. But, it occurs. I shared with them a story of church who was considering closing their doors because attendance had dropped so low. They remained open and turned themselves around. Most of the congregation was happy and excited. Yet, there were individuals in the church who did not celebrate. They held onto resentment. The members who remained through the bad times resented those who had disappeared and now were back to enjoy the good years.

I do think that churches have to be cautious though. We want to demonstrate God's love to all. However, the love to all must come from us living out the Gospel and our baptismal promises, as Lutherans and **NOT** out of self-preservation. That is no easy task when we as a church see that we might be in survival mode.

The other side of the coin, no real pun intended, is that we must wrestle with the question: *are you lost or found?*

Most, if not all, Christians automatically place themselves in the shoes of the ninety-nine sheep or the nine coins. We then look at this story as the found and how we respond and or treat the lost. However, I

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would like for us to flip the script and realize that the real point of the story is that we are all lost who need to be found. The reason for this thought process is that even if we have been an obedient sheep for fifty years, we were at one point found by God.

No matter what you have done or no matter what you will do, remember that God will continue to seek after you. God will still look for you. God is persistent in their pursuit after you.

Even though I have spoken about grumbling and resentment, I do not believe that is what the passage is truly about. It is not even about the lost. Instead, it truly is about a God who seeks the lost and rejoices when sinners repent. In the message version, verse ten states the following:

Count on it—that's the kind of party God's angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God."

I shared with the bible study group on Tuesday that "repent" means to turn and face a new direction. No longer lost, the person now faces God. Instead of anger and wrath, the lost discovers a God who welcomes the lost home and throws a party. No doubt the lost person rejoices, but this joy pales in comparison to the joy of God who finds the lost.

We, a church, should throw more parties. We need to celebrate what God is doing. At worship, we are invited to participate in the celebration of the feast and body and blood of Jesus Christ. Sinners are welcomed to the feast. Forgiveness is extended. Let the party begin with God as the host, rejoicing with gusto.

In our baptismal promises, we promised that we will *hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper*. May we have the courage, among our busy schedules create time and space where we can hear the word of God and celebrate the Lord's supper. It's tough though, right?

Bay View is not unique. Many churches, including ourselves, are feeling the effects of burnout and exhaustion. The pandemic has stretched us and others to the brink. There is no going back to 2019. Many individuals who have helped keep the lights on and the bills paid find themselves increasingly stretched. They then wonder if there will be enough and are trying to figure out how they can inspire others to help.

In the second parable, it seems like the woman invested a lot of time and energy in searching for her lost coin. Each and everyone of us can relate. We have searched for those keys, that important document, a particular tool, that missing puzzle piece so we could finish the puzzle. Thus, the risk is not leaving the ninety-nine sheep alone but in spending energy, resources, and time that may not be recognized, rewarded or replenished.

May I conclude with words from my colleague Kendra Mohn when she says, "God still rejoices in us. Putting one more piece of the puzzle in place in God's community is cause for celebration. The persistence and resilience of the Christian community in recent struggles is gratifying to witness. The joy of God is Good News, both for the 99 and for the 1. **AMEN.**"