

Written Copy: Eating with Sinners and Rejoicing With Angels-Luke 15:7

Proper 19-14th Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, September 15th, 2019

Text: Luke 15:7

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.

⁷I say to you that in the same manner there will be joy in heaven over one person who lives a sinful lifestyle who continues to repent (changing his thinking after experiencing a heart change) rather than over the ninety-nine who are in right standing (just) before God who have no need of repentance.

Exegetical Statement

The Pharisees and Scribes (Experts and Teachers in the Jewish Laws) observe how those they consider to be permanently excluded from God's kingdom because of their inability and unwillingness to keep the laws as they do are coming to Jesus and He is welcoming them. Not only that He is eating with them, have table fellowship with those He should be shunning. They murmur and grumble. Jesus hears them and tells all present two parables that explain why He is reaching out to these considered beyond salvation. He explains that God loves even those who have strayed away and are lost in the devil's kingdom. Rather than let them go in order to remain only in the company of those considered to be righteous Jesus goes after them. The second parable concerning the coins describes the careful and diligent search for one single lost person. When He finds them, He doesn't tell them to find their way back through law keeping but carries them back through Law and Gospel. He works repentant faith in their hearts which is the only thing that can bring them into Jesus' kingdom. Whenever this happens, whenever an unbeliever's heart and mind is changed by the Gospel there is a great celebration in heaven. His message to these religious leaders' is shouldn't there be great rejoicing among them too that unbelievers are being brought into the kingdom instead of murmuring and grumbling? God desires that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. But God also desires that the one be saved, each person is important to Him, and should be to us, His Church, as well.

Focus Statement:

Jesus loves and desires all men to come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus loves you and went after you to bring you into His kingdom. He searched, found, cleaned you up and healed you in Baptism. He brought you into His sheepfold and keeps you there with repentant faith. He is concerned with the one, the individual, each and all are important to Him and worthy to receive His Gospel Message.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We can be judgmental like the religious leaders seeing some as beyond God's grace and forgiveness. Like the Pharisees and Scribes we like to remain in our "holy huddle" unwilling to welcome those who have been living sinful lifestyles seeing them unworthy of the grace and forgiveness we are to proclaim to all

What the hearer should do as a result:

Instead of discriminating between who deserves to be witnessed to, we should be willing to leave our holy huddle and go after the lost around us, trusting that the power to change hearts and lives comes from Jesus' Spirit working through the Gospel witness.

Subject Sentence: Eat with Sinners to Rejoice in their Salvation

The Pastor was new in town. He asked his Head Elder to show him around. He was particularly interested in going someplace where he could mingle with the everyday townsfolk and share the Gospel. So it was that the Head Elder took him to a real-life version of the bar from the movie “Roadhouse”. The kind of place where the night ends with multiple people being carted off to jail. When they walked in and the Pastor got the lay of the land, he asked his Elder, “What on earth did you bring me to a place like this for?” The Elder replied, “This will give you the perfect opportunity to share the Gospel with those who need to hear it most.” So they hung out for a while, sitting at the bar, nursing a drink or two while most everyone else became very inebriated. The Pastor tried to talk to a few of the patrons but time and again was rebuffed, usually with a string of colorful metaphors to send him on his way. Finally the Pastor told the Elder that he’d had enough and was about to head home. As he made his way toward the door, he heard a loud argument and the shatter of glass from the pool table over in the corner. He turned to see a white cue ball heading right toward his noggin. It connected and he passed out. He woke up to find himself and his Elder in the Drunk Tank at the local jail. He turned to his Elder and said “This is a fine mess you’ve gotten me into! How is it gonna look when everyone knows the new Pastor had to spend his first night in jail?” The Elder replied, “Didn’t I promise you the perfect opportunity to share the Gospel with those who need to hear it most? Just look around! You’ve got all the town’s worst sinners gathered right here before you. And best of all, even more than on Sunday morning, they’re a captive audience!”

Jesus had a habit of welcoming sinners and eating with them. As His Church so should we. But there is a difference between welcoming them and joining in with them. There’s a big difference in meeting them where they are, in whatever sinful lifestyle that may be, and approving of that lifestyle in the name of a loving God. There is a difference between calling what the Bible declares to be against God’s will sin, including those things our culture approves of such as same sex marriage, cohabitation, and sexual promiscuity, and mandating that one must totally change before we can share Jesus with them. The Religious leaders of our day struggle with this, just as those of Jesus day did too.

Our Gospel Lesson begins with **Luke 15:1-2** **"¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."** The Pharisees and the Scribes are upset with Jesus because He is openly welcoming and hanging out with men and women, they have judged to be too sinful, too wicked, too far gone to ever be welcomed into God's Kingdom. Who might these be? Well Tax Collectors for certain: those who were Jews but were acting like traitors, doing the nasty work for occupying Rome by collecting their own people's hard-earned money, plus some extra to line the Tax Collectors pockets. They were women who were prostitutes, some by choice, but some out of necessity having been divorced and therefore not desirable for a young upstanding Jewish man to marry. There were others who had fallen into sinful pursuits and vices and had become entrapped by them so that they were now unable to pull themselves out. And over all of them the Pharisees and the Scribes stood in judgement. In order to be declared "righteous", good enough to become an acceptable part of the religious society, these men and women had to live up to these religious leaders' standards of righteousness. Standards that went beyond God's laws in Scripture. Standards meant to keep these kinds of people on the outside.

It was these that were coming to Jesus. And He warmly and openly welcomed them despite the grumbling of these religious leaders. Jesus wants to address this grumbling, to show the religious leaders why its uncalled for. He also wants to share with these men and women who have been declared to be never good enough for His kingdom why He came. So He tells all of those assembled two parables about things that were lost being found.

He tells about one sheep out of a flock of a hundred that has wandered away. And for any sheep by itself this would mean certain death if it was not found soon. There was the danger of injury as it negotiated rough terrain, being swept away by fast moving streams as it tried to get a drink, and the worst danger of all: being killed and consumed by a wild animal. So Jesus poses the question: **Luke 15:4-6** **"⁴What 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? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And 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.'" In this parable Jesus is the Shepherd who will go out and search after the lost sheep. And in this parable the lost sheep is represents each one of these sinful men and women that were too evil to be considered worthy of help by the Pharisees and Scribes. Unworthy of their time, but not of Jesus' time. Too evil for these leaders, but not too evil for Jesus to save through the Gospel.

Jesus uses the imagery of sheep and shepherd for a reason. Not just because many of those listening would know about keeping sheep, although they would. Not because the Pharisees and Scribes were shepherds themselves because more than likely they were not. Jesus is calling their attention to what God declares in our Old Testament Lesson from Ezekiel 34. Verses that these Scribes, being experts in the Jewish Law and writings would know well. **Verse 12: "As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness."** **Verse 15: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD."** And **Verses 22-23: ²²I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken."** God had put these religious leaders to be in the position of shepherd to watch over all his flock. Instead they only really cared about themselves and would do nothing to help those who had fallen away, who had fallen into sin.

Because they failed God the Son came down, became a man in the lineage of the Great Shepherd David, and took upon His shoulders the task of reaching out to not just the lost sheep of Israel, but to rescue all men from falling prey to everlasting death in the kingdom of the devil. Jesus was God in human form that had come to be this shepherd. No one else on earth deserved the right to enter into God's kingdom by their words and actions, not even the Pharisees and the Scribes who could never live out the righteousness they claimed

to have. But Jesus could and did. He lived a perfect life of love and service to God and fellow man. But His greatest act of service, His greatest act to save the lost sheep was to give His life to forgive their wandering; your wandering, and my wandering. To forgive the sinful pursuits we engage in, as well as our propensity to see others as the Scribes and Pharisees do. He died to forgive our judgmental attitude by which we see some as beyond the grace and forgiveness of Christ. He died to forgive the sins of all men. All of their sins are taken away. Just as all of your sins are taken away, even those that might shame you most. You stand forgiven of them.

You are the lost sheep that He came to rescue. He came and found you. He directed your parents to bring you to the baptismal font where He washes you clean and binds up the spiritual wounds that your sins cause you, a washing that continues to this day. He rescued you out of the devil's kingdom and carries you home through your presence here in the Ark that is the Church. He keeps you safe in this His sheepfold through the Law and the Gospel applied to your heart and your life. He shows you your sin so that through repentant faith you seek to live a new life of obedience, one that is made possible only by the grace that continues to flow to you from the cross. The Scribes and Pharisees would be right to claim that you and I, in and of ourselves, are unworthy for God's Kingdom. But Christ makes us worthy by faith and declares us to be worthy because we believe using that faith, and keeps you worthy by keeping us in repentant faith. That faith through which you Confess your sins before God and one another, and through which you hold fast to the Words of Absolution declared straight from the mouth of Christ.

Jesus ended the parable by saying in Luke 15:7 **“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.”** When you were baptized there was a joyful celebration. Not just in the Sanctuary where it occurred but in the presence of God and the Angels in Heaven. And when another person has been found by our Savior working through the Gospel message there should be a joyful celebration among us just as there is in heaven. We need not feel bad because the joy over this coming to faith exceeds the joy of our remaining in faith.

Because as those declared righteous by the same faith, we join in that celebration with them.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost, to search for the lost sheep that are here around us in Flint. He calls on us, His Church to be His hands and His feet in the searching. He describes for us the parable about the woman in **Luke 15:8** who, **“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?”** He desires us to be diligent in our works as His hands and feet searching for the lost. And how are we to do it? Not by becoming lost ourselves. Not by joining in with them in whatever sinful pursuit that they spend their time doing. Not by winding up in the drunk tank. But to be welcoming as Jesus was. To meet with them in a neutral place. Have lunch with them. Talk with them. Don't worry about those who may grumble at your actions like modern day Pharisees and Scribes. Meet them where they are at but do not join them. Do a lot of listening. Look for the hurts and pains and uncertainties that may plague them and all who live a lifestyle contrary to God's will and plan. And when the time is right, give them Jesus. Tell them about how you in your life fall short of God's will and plan. Join them in Paul's confession in **1 Timothy 1:15** **“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”** Tell them how Jesus came and sought you out. How He saved you from eternal death and carried you home to live a life of repentant faith in His safe sheepfold that is His Church. Who knows? Maybe you will have the opportunity to rejoice with the angels in heaven as another lost sheep is found. May the same Shepherd who found you when you were lost keep you in steadfast until life everlasting. Amen

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