

Scripture:

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-10

“The joy of salvation.”

Today in Luke’s gospel we once again find Jesus in the company of the religious leaders of His day ----- and they are grumbling and muttering and complaining about what He is doing.

Verses 1 and 2 from Luke’s gospel today -----

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.””

Eugene Peterson --- in the Message --- translates these opening verses this way ---

“By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful 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.

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In response to the grumbling of the religious leaders Jesus offers 2 stories.

The parable of the lost sheep ----- and the parable of the lost coin.

A sheep is lost and found and there is great celebration.

And a coin is lost and found and there is great celebration.

And in these parables --- we have arresting depictions of God.

In the parables we have a relentlessly searching God ----- a God who won’t give up until what is lost is found.

For sure there are times in scripture when God can be seen as a taskmaster --
- or a vindictive judge ----- or even a divine scorekeeper.

But not today ---- not in Luke's gospel.

Here we have a searching God --- a seeking God --- a God who will not give
up on the lost --- will not stop the search until the lost are found.

And it's with a disposition of love that God seeks the lost in these parables.

The lost are found here first and foremost because of a determined and a
graceful love.

Remember the lost don't ever repent in these parables.

These are not stories about repentance they are stories about love ---- God's
love.

A coin and a sheep cannot repent.

Repentance is a part of our discipleship --- but it really isn't touched on at
any length in the gospel today.

The parables focus on the truth that God wants nothing more than to seek the
lost and find the misguided ----- the confused --- the strays ----- and the
castaways.

It's a passage all about the profound nature of God's love and how nothing
delights God more than the lost being found --- the sinner being brought
home once again.

And just as the coin or the sheep don't earn their being found ---- so we
don't ever earn our being found.

Our salvation in Christ --- comes to us freely.

It begins with a loving searching God.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were muttering away about who Jesus sat with --- who He ate with ---- who He primarily concerned Himself with and were totally missing out on the thrust of His ministry.

And so as they grumble about who He is with ---- who He eats with --- who He speaks to -- and hangs around with ---- as they grumble about all of these things --- Jesus steps up and shares these stories about the nature of God's love and how God seeks the lost endlessly.

They are frustrated with Jesus ---- upset that He isn't spending as much time with them.

Them ---- the respected teachers and leaders --- the religious authorities.

Instead Jesus "wastes" all His time with the low lives and outcasts ---- "tax collectors and sinners" ---- as verse 1 says.

And so in response to their grumbling and disappointment ---- Jesus shares these stories about how great a delight it is when the lost are found ----- and how we are to celebrate the very fact that God's love looks beyond our folly and embraces us with love.

Some people might say of the shepherd in the first parable --- "Well he wasn't very bright now was he --- I wouldn't want a shepherd watching my sheep who leaves 99 unattended just to find one ---- why wouldn't he be more prudent and just let go of the one and stay with the 99 ensuring the safety of the majority as a first priority?"

"What if something happens and while he is gone searching for the one and the 99 get attacked and many of them are eaten or killed?"

"Won't he look silly if he comes back after finally finding the one only to find that 6 or even 8 have been eaten by wolves?"

"Then he'll only have 92 --- at least if he had of let go of the one lost one he would still have 99."

Perhaps ---- maybe sometimes it is prudent to just let some things go --- but at the same time who would ever hire --- and who would ever want to be

under the care of someone who the minute you fall away one time ---- gives up on you.

When you see someone who lead go after the one in need with determination and resolve you have great confidence in them and want them to be your leader.

If you see someone who the minute someone falls away just keeps on going and lets them fall by the wayside --- you may just say to yourself ---- “I hope I’m never in need with this shepherd --- because if I am he may just give up on me and only ever concern himself with the majority.”

When the shepherd pays a high price to find the one lost one ----- he also offers the most profound security to the many who quickly realize he would do anything for them just as he did everything for the lost one.

In the shepherd Jesus paints the picture of a God who seeks the lost relentlessly.

In the shepherd Jesus paints the picture of one who is concerned deeply with the lost.

And of course Jesus Himself came for the lost.

Jesus is the champion of the lost cause.

Just a little past our passage today in Luke’s gospel --- in Luke 19 verse 10 Jesus says ---- “For the son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

“For the son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law --- grumble that Jesus is spending too much time with low lives --- tax collectors ---- sinners --- promiscuous women --- like the one at the well in John’s gospel --- tanners ---people with questionable reputations --- the lost.

And in response to their grumbling Jesus tells 2 stories about 2 people who were on the outside looking in --- one a shepherd --- generally looked upon as outcast --- and a woman ---- generally regarded as second class citizens in a male dominated world.

In response to all their grumbling Jesus tells 2 stories about 2 outcasts --- 2 second class citizens who relentlessly seek the lost --- one a lost sheep and the other a lost coin.

Jen Hatmaker ---- someone Kate has been reading recently ---- wrote this in her book ---- “Interrupted: When Jesus wrecks your comfortable Christianity” ----

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And she then goes on to say -----

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We almost have to be marginalized to become capable of hearing the gospel. On the margins Jesus’ social implications are crystal clear.”

In a way this is precisely what this passage is all about?

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law are the winners ----- in society --- the somebody’s --- and they kind of look at Jesus as lunatic.

And they become more and more disgruntled and frustrated with Jesus the more they watch Him ---- and follow Him around.

Because many of the people in the crowds that follow Him are low lives and outcasts --- the “losers”.

And not only were there a lot of “losers” and low lives in the crowds ----- but even worse all of these “losers” and low lives were precisely the ones Jesus spent the most time with and gave the most attention to.

The truth is Jesus spent most of His time with people that no one really liked ----- and the leaders of His day found this unacceptable and corrupting even --- and they weren't about to stand for it or let it continue.

These parables are all about the gracious love of God and the never giving up nature of God.

The shepherd never gave up until he found the lost sheep ---and the woman never gave up until she found the lost coin.

In a similar fashion God never gives up on us.

A coin cannot repent and a sheep cannot repent.

These stories are not first and foremost about human actions ----- every walk of faith --- every conversion in Christ --- begins first with God's saving and loving action towards us.

If the stories were about human actions --- repenting even --- then we would see human action held up.

But they're not --- they're about divine actions and nature --- God's profound love for us.

And the next parable ----- read ahead in Luke's gospel later today or sometime this week ----- the next parable drives the exact same point home.

After the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin --- comes the parable of the prodigal's son.

The lost son who returns home and is welcomed in by his father with open loving arms.

Open loving arms --- despite have made an absolute mess of things not only with his life but with his family just before he left and made a mess of his life.

Jesus is the champion of the lost cause.

Jesus came to save and to seek out the lost.

There is more joy in heaven when one lost is found --- when one receives the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Pharisee's and religious leaders have lost their sense of wonder and awe --- their appreciation of all that God has done and continues to do for them ----- they have neglected to seek the lost and have become preoccupied with their little internal clique of other believers.

And as is so often the case when we get sidetracked or pre-occupied with something along comes Jesus with a message for us ----- and His message for the leaders was fairly simple

“God is amazing ---- His love never ends ----- He is forever working in the world seeking the lost and searching for the misguided ----- so concern yourselves less with how righteous and brilliant you are in interpreting the law --- the scriptures --- and get out there and seek the lost just as the shepherd and the woman in these stories sought the lost.”

“Get back to basics ---- and participate in the Kingdom of God ---- and go and help the sinners ---- proclaim good news to the poor ---- proclaim freedom to the prisoners ----- recover sight for the blind ----- set the oppressed free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”

These parables function as arresting and breathtaking ----- refreshing responses to the complaints of the Pharisees ---- and teachers of the law.

There is great joy in salvation --- there is great joy because of God's unending love for us.

That's where every story of coming to Christ begins --- a profound recognition of God's love.

No one ever repents --- at least not genuinely ----- if they don't already know that there is a profound sense of love already present.

To repent in Biblical terms isn't just about saying I'm sorry and seeking forgiveness.

Repentance or ----- “Metanoia” in Koine or Biblical Greek --- is all about a change of direction --- a change of heart --- a change of mind ---- a change of life.

More than anything Jesus wants a change of heart and change of mind a change of direction ---- repentance --- “metanoia” ----- such that we are now headed for God ----- headed for salvation ----- headed for heaven instead of being lost and wandering around aimlessly forever scratching the itches of our own wants and desires.

But we won't eve repent without first a profound recognition and understanding of the great love of God.

Repentance isn't groveling --- it's turning to the King of Love and being embraced by Him.

Heaven rejoices ----- there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God - ----- when we have a change of heart and direction and return home ----- return to the will of God.

Jesus tells these parables because so many of the Pharisees and scribes and religious teachers ----- had lost their ways --- had gone astray like the sheep - ----- had become lost like the coin.

And Jesus wants to remind them to rely less on themselves and their achievements and accomplishments and instead celebrate and share God's profound love for them and for each and every person they meet.

The leaders have lost any sense of the joy that comes with knowing just how much God loves them and to what length God is willing to go to save them and keep them safe.

Instead they're grumbling away about how much time Jesus seems to be spending with people of questionable status.

They're way out of line --- they want Jesus to pay attention more to them --- aren't they better people ---- aren't they more deserving of Jesus' attention than the other low lives that Jesus seems so content on spending time with?

Instead of just playing around with interpreting the law and scriptures Jesus wanted them to remember God's great love for them.

And He wanted them to ---- turn and share this great love with others -----
 -- and proclaim good news to the poor ---- freedom to the prisoners ----- set
 the oppressed free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Jesus wants them to remember things like -----

“For when I was hungry you gave me something to eat --- when I was thirsty
 you gave me something to drink. And when I was a stranger you invited me
 in.

When I need clothes you clothed me --- and when I was sick you looked
 after me --- when in prison you came to visit me.

What you did to the least of these you did also to me.”

Jesus wants these Pharisees to see that just as there was a huge party and
 much rejoicing after the shepherd and the woman found the lost sheep and
 coin ---- so there is much rejoicing in heaven and among the angels when the
 love of God is shared with the lost --- and the outcast --- the so called
 “losers” ---- and nobodies in this world --- the marginalized.

There is no greater joy ---- than the joy of salvation.

The joy of being found by God ---- the joy of coming alive in Christ.

Jesus is the champion of the lost cause.

Heaven comes alive the most --- the angels of God rejoice the loudest and
 fiercest and most enthusiastically when someone lost is found ----- when the
 saving love of Jesus Christ enters into a new heart.

Jesus is the champion of the lost cause.

He spent most of His time gathering people around Him that nobody really
 wanted and teaching them that God loves them ----- and inviting them to
 love in ways that they had never previously imagined --- all because of
 God's great love.

Jesus wasn't concerned with credentials and who you were or who you new.

He went along town to town and gathered people around Him who needed help ----- and then He loved them ----- and showed them just how much God loved them and how they in turn could love others in God's name too.

Jesus wanted to more than anything to see changed hearts not perfect hearts - -- but changed hearts.

When the kingdom of God breaks into imperfect people --- taking the broken and lost ---- the disoriented and confused --- and making them something beautiful amidst their brokenness ----- that's where Jesus is most often found.

“For the son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

The Christian story begins with God's love --- God searching for us relentlessly until finally we are found.

And the Christian story ends with God's love ----- us turning to others in their need --- in their brokenness --- in their lostness --- and sharing God's love.

What a great joy it is indeed to see a heart changed ---- to see a heart opened up to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

To the king eternal --- immortal ---- invisible --- be all glory ----- and honour now and forever.

Amen.