

THE TRUE JOY OF SALVATION
Sermon for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost, 2019
Luke 15:1-10

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 15:1-10: ¹ **All the tax-collectors and other sinners were coming to Jesus to hear Him.** ² **However, the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled and said, “This Man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”**

³ **He told them this parable:** ⁴ **“Which man among you who has a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the other ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and is glad. ⁶ He goes home, calls his friends and neighbours together and tells them, ‘Be happy with me! For I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.**

⁸ **“Or which woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house and look for it carefully until she finds it? ⁹ When she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Be happy with me! For I have found the coin that I lost.’ ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Luke chapter 15 has been called “the lost and found chapter.” It has also been called the heart of the third gospel which presents a series of stories about outcasts. A little later in Luke’s Gospel we will hear Jesus say, *“The Son of Man has come to search for, and to save, what has been lost”* (19:10). The lost find in Jesus a Saviour while the proud and self-righteous find in Him a judge.

So today we have another parable from the mouth of Jesus. Actually, it is two parables, and they appear to be part of a three-parable set. All three have to do with joy over finding what was lost. First, a shepherd rejoices over finding the one lost sheep out of a hundred; next, a woman rejoices to find the one coin she had lost out of ten; finally, the third parable, which is not part of our lesson this morning, is the one often called “The Prodigal Son”; a father who has two sons who gives a joyous banquet to celebrate the return of the one who had been lost.

Another way of looking at these parables may well be to call one *the parable of the sheep that was found*, and the other *the parable of the coin that was found* since that seems to be the burden of the parables. The prodigal son would then become *the parable of the son that was found*. While the three seem to be a set, the prodigal son seems to have a different message, though similar, from these two in our text today, but the message of these two parables is not really that the sheep and the coin were lost, or that they were found, but that **there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.**

At this moment in history, we find ourselves struggling through, among other things, severe drought. The ongoing drought is almost crippling as we put up with wind, dust, and bushfires – may God soon show mercy and send us rain! Yet even though we struggle through all this, we must admit that we still live in a land of plenty. Jesus didn’t. He lived in a land of scarcity. The world of abundance and security that we live in is something that the people of Jesus’ time could only imagine. For them, making sure you had food for your next meal was a major preoccupation. Food was not so abundant for most people. Generally they had only the clothing they were wearing, and the only meal that was certain was the one they had in their hands at the moment. While it is true that our world could devolve into that same sort of uncertainty and need - and we earnestly pray that God would keep us safe from such troubles in these days, yet from our modern world, it is difficult to understand just how striking the parables Jesus spoke were.

In Jesus’ time, sheep was a form of wealth. It grew wool, which could be shorn and spun into thread and woven into cloth, or sold for money, or traded for goods, food, or clothing. You could milk a sheep and have milk to drink or

cheese to eat, or something to sell or trade for things you needed. You could butcher a sheep and have a feast - although they did that very rarely because once you killed the animal, you had to eat it fairly quickly since there was no refrigeration. The hide could then be used to make wineskins, or shoes or whatever leather could be used for. However, once you killed it, it was gone and done. But while alive, a sheep was a form of present and potential profit, and a form of security against future needs. No wonder then that when a man **who has a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, leaves the other ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until he finds it... When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and is glad.**

Again, think of the woman who lost a coin. Jesus asks, ⁸ **“Or which woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house and look for it carefully until she finds it?”** The word Luke uses in our text for “coin” is a translation of the word *drachma*; the only time this particular Greek silver coin is mentioned in the Bible. Much more common is the Roman *denarius*. Both were worth about the same: a day’s wages of a hired hand. The value of the coin is not the issue, but that the woman *has ten and has lost one* - not an insignificant loss for her. Imagine losing ten percent or more of your resources. The loss is staggering for her. Jesus suggests in the way He asks the question, that He would expect that almost anybody would do the same, in her position. It is a matter of stewardship and a big deal to lose so much money.

The shepherd *goes searching* for the lost sheep. The woman *searches diligently* for her lost coin. How many of us has had the experience - probably more than once! - of mislaying something and searching frantically for it. Perhaps we can understand the feeling of the loss and the search, even over relatively insignificant things. But these losses in the parable are not insignificant, and in each case, the lost is found! The sheep is discovered and carried home. It is so precious, and the joy of the owner is such, that he doesn’t even let the animal walk home, but **he lays it on his shoulders**. The woman finds her coin and **calls her friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Be happy with me! For I have found the coin that I lost.’** Then Jesus says, in each case, that the joy in heaven over each sinner who repents is something like that.

The point is that the joy of God and His angels is like that joy of discovery when each one of His children come to faith, and repents of sin, and finds salvation. That is the joy of salvation.

The striking thing, however, is that the joy of salvation is not *our* joy, but God’s joy! It is the joy of all of heaven over each one who is saved. People talk a lot about how we are to have this joy over salvation, but can any of us remember hearing much talk about the joy of salvation being God’s joy?

The point of the parables is that there is joy in heaven - which must be the joy of God - over those who repent, who come to faith and believe in God’s forgiveness and love. That profound joy, likened by Jesus to the joy of finding the lost sheep or recovering a lost treasure tells us of the value God places on each one of us.

But what does Jesus mean when He speaks of the **ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent?** Who are they?

Remember, ¹ **All the tax-collectors and other sinners were coming to Jesus to hear Him.** ² **However, the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled and said, “This Man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”**

The Pharisees and scribes were self-righteous who claimed that they did not need to repent. When Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep, He said that once the sheep was found, the man **goes home, calls his friends and neighbours together and tells them, ‘Be happy with me! For I have found my lost sheep.’** The question the Pharisees and scribes had to ask themselves was, “Are we still in the wilderness, or have we too returned to join in the festive meal of rejoicing over the recovery of the lost sheep?” The Pharisees knew that these parables were directed against them. They knew that, in Jesus’ view, all need to repent, so that there was no such thing as people who have no need for repentance. The Pharisees knew that they had rejected first of all John’s call for repentance¹ and so have also rejected God’s plan of salvation in John and Jesus.² As they listened carefully to the parable, they were never told whether the ninety-nine were still in the wilderness or had returned to the village. Jesus left it up in the air because these parables are His call to them to repentance. Are they going to be rescued by Jesus and rejoice with **the tax-**

¹ Matthew 3:1-12

² cf. Luke 7:29-35

collectors and other sinners? If so, then they should stop grumbling, repent, be brought to the village, and join the feast with Jesus. If not, they will be left in the wilderness, in need of a shepherd to find them and bring them to the feast. The remaining ministry of Jesus, and the mission of the church, is to continue to call - and carry - the ninety-nine in from the wilderness home to the feast of Jesus.

There is no doubt that God finds such great joy over a single penitent person. That tells us that sin is **that bad** and the love of God for us is **that great!**

Of course, that is not exactly a secret. We see that love for us on the cross. The cross shows us *graphically* the price that God was willing to pay that we may be redeemed and set free from our own folly and wickedness! He was willing to send His own Son. That fact tells us just how terrible sin is and what an awful price was required to redeem us from ours! It also tells us that Christ loves us with such a complete love that He was willing to bear even the pains of the cross and the torment of the passion to set us free from sin and death and hell.

The parables of our Gospel lesson this morning are meant to underline just how deep that love is and how great the value God places on us. While it is easy to imagine that we are nothing special, except perhaps to ourselves, and that God does not notice us, Christ tells us that God's joy over us is like the joy we would feel in recovering precious and valuable things that we have lost - things for which we would diligently search. We are precious and valuable to Him.

They also remind us that our salvation is secure and certain. We are not insignificant to God. Our faith and our salvation stand as causes for great heavenly joy among **the presence of the angels.** It is easy to be fooled by the sameness of each day into thinking that one day is no more important than another. Just the same, we can look around us and see that there are billions of people, and, from that, to conclude, without really thinking much about it, that we are unimportant and relatively worthless. But the parable tells us that such thoughts are wrong and speaks to the tremendous value God places on each one that believes, each one that repents, each one that is His child.

One of the blessings of life in this world is what we call the law of diminishing returns. It is how we live with pains and sorrows and live through horrible experiences. We do not have the capacity to feel the same pain and horror day in and day out. We “get used to it,” so to speak. It also works to dull our pleasures and diminish our joys. What is a delight today becomes ‘every day’ if we keep experiencing it. The power of one moment fades with repetition. It is a blessing when what fades is pain, and it is curse when what fades is a joy.

So, being a Christian starts out wonderful, but becomes just part of the daily fabric of life after a while. We can come to think it is insignificant and not so special and that we are, like our experience of faith, not all that striking or precious or beloved. Jesus reminds us with these parables that *it is not so with God.* He is *delighted* that we are believers. There is **joy in the presence of the angels of God** - great joy - **more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people** who believe that they have no need for God or forgiveness.

That we hold this place in the heart of God also assures us that our salvation is not a passing whim. He will not forget us for we are a great joy to Him. He will not allow us to endure more than we are able to bear³ because He cares for us, He treasures each one of us that belong to Him. He will see to it that we are safe in His protection. He will not allow the moments of our lives to destroy us or snatch us away from Him. We are the lambs He went out to find, leaving the flock behind. We are the coin that He searched diligently for, and when He found us, He rejoiced greatly with all the company of heaven.

We are held in His arms and secure. All our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake! We are carried on His shoulders safely back to the fold. Jesus told us about the joy of salvation so that we would trust in the love of God and know that we are secure in Him. God isn't what we think of Him to be - He is much better, more loving, much more pleased that we are His than we have the natural ability to imagine. Are you happy with forgiveness? Does it please you to know the love of God in Jesus Christ? If it does, that is wonderful. However, the greatest joy in our salvation is not ours, it is the joy God, and all of heaven, that we have been brought to repent, and to trust in Him for forgiveness, grace, and love. That is the true joy of salvation, and it is the message of the parables Jesus told in our Gospel lesson this morning. Amen.

³ 1 Corinthians 10:13

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, heavenly Father, You have raised from death the Lord Jesus, our great Shepherd, because His death fulfilled Your eternal covenant to save us from sin. We praise You for Your marvellous love and goodness, and pray that You would give us everything we need to know and do Your will, and to live to Your honour and praise. Come into our lives with the power of Your Holy Spirit. Renew in us a true and living faith in Jesus Christ Your Son, so that we may be completely united with Him, trusting not in our own goodness, but in the righteousness based on His death for us.

Keep us from fearing, loving, and trusting anyone or anything more than You. Fill us with love for You, which expresses itself in humble, loving service to our neighbours. Help us to act justly, to love mercy, and to live humbly before You, our God. Move us to show respect to everybody, to be generous to the needy, to share the burdens of the weak, and to act in sincere love to all people. Help us to pattern our lives on Jesus Christ. Make our words sincere and edifying, our lives pure and godly, and our relationships with others peaceful and harmonious.

Make Your Church so aware of Your countless blessings, especially the gift of the Gospel, that it may continually respond with thanks and praise. Inspire Your people to proclaim Christ's saving love to all mankind. Give pastors a true understanding of Your Word. Give wise judgment to those in positions of leadership. Give us all a loving compassion to people in need.

Bless our country and its people, that mercy, truth, uprightness, and peace may be evident everywhere. Give us leaders whose concern is not to serve personal pride or party loyalties, but to be Your instruments of service to all.

Fill our homes with the joy of Your presence. Inspire parents with the Spirit of Christ, so that they may encourage their children by word and example to live godly lives and to find joy in serving You and their fellowmen.

Bless all good and useful employment. Give to all both satisfaction in what they do and a fair reward for their efforts. Teach people in all situations to remember that they are accountable to You for every word and action.

Look with pity on those who are facing trouble and trials, especially those Christians who are suffering for the sake of their faith. Strengthen all the needy by Your mighty power, that they may remember that You are their only Saviour and help.

We thank You for the emergency services who have been actively involved in fighting the recent bushfires. Guard and protect them and give them relief by sending rain and much more favourable weather conditions to fight fires. Watch over and be with those who have lost property in the recent bushfires, and help them to rebuild their lives and to not give up hope.

Hear our prayers for Jesus' sake, O Lord, that we may praise You for ever and ever. Amen.

The 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 34:11-24

¹¹ For this is what the Lord GOD has said: "Look! I Myself shall search for My sheep and look after them.

¹² As a shepherd cares for his flock when he is among his scattered sheep, so I shall look after My sheep. I shall rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a cloudy and very gloomy day. ¹³ I shall bring them out from the peoples, gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land. I shall be a shepherd to them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the inhabited places of the land. ¹⁴ I shall look after them in good pasture, and their grazing-land will be on the mountain-heights of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing-land and graze in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I Myself shall shepherd My sheep and I Myself shall let

them lie down," declares the Lord GOD.

¹⁶ "I shall search for the lost ones, bring back those that have been scattered, bandage the injured ones and strengthen the sick ones. I shall destroy the ones that are fat and the strong. I shall shepherd them with justice.

¹⁷ "As for you, My flock, this is what the Lord GOD has said: 'Look! I judge between individual sheep and between rams and male goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink water that has settled that you must make the rest of the water muddy with your feet? ¹⁹ Must My sheep feed on what you have trampled with your feet and drink what you have made muddy with your feet?'"

²⁰ Therefore, this is what the Lord GOD has said to

them: “Look! I, yes, I Myself, shall judge between a fat sheep and a lean sheep. ²¹ Because you shove with your sides and shoulders and butt all the weak animals away with your horns until you have scattered them to the outside, ²² I shall save My flock, that they may not be something to plunder any longer. I shall judge between one sheep and another.

²³ “I shall appoint one Shepherd over them, My Servant David, and He will shepherd them. He will take care of them and He Himself will be their Shepherd. ²⁴ I Myself, the LORD, shall be their God, and My Servant David will be the Prince among them. I Myself, the LORD, have spoken.

1 Timothy 1:5-17

⁵ The purpose of this command is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience and from sincere faith. ⁶ Certain people have deviated from these and have turned to meaningless talk. ⁷ They want to be teachers of the Law but understand neither what they are saying nor the things about which they are speaking so confidently. ⁸ However, we know that the Law is good if someone uses it lawfully. ⁹ He knows this, that the Law has not been laid down for a righteous person but for those who are lawless and insubordinate, for ungodly and sinful people, for those who are unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers, for those who kill their mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ for those who are sexually immoral, for homosexuals, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers and for whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, ¹¹ which conforms to the glorious Good News of the blessed God, which has been entrusted to me.

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has made me strong. For He has considered me to be trustworthy and has appointed me into the ministry, ¹³ although I used to be a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent man. However, I have received mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord has also been exceedingly abundant, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the chief. ¹⁶ However, for this reason I have received mercy, that Christ Jesus may demonstrate all His patience in me, the chief of sinners, as an example to those who are going to believe in Him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King eternal, the immortal, invisible and only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever! Amen.

Luke 15:1-10

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