

Sermon for September 15, 2013 – 17th Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 15:1-10

Theme: This Man Welcomes Sinners

- 1) *With great concern he searches for the lost.*
- 2) *With great joy he carries them home.*

¹ All the tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus to hear Him. ² But the Pharisees and the Bible scholars grumbled and said, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ So He told them this story: ⁴ "If anyone of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, don't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you find it? ⁵ When you find it, you lay it on your shoulders and are glad. ⁶ You go home and call your friends and neighbors together and say to them, 'Be happy with me. I found my lost sheep!' ⁷ So, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine good people who don't need to repent." ⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and sweep the house and look for it carefully until she finds it? ⁹ When she finds it, she calls her women friends and neighbors together and says, 'Be happy with me. I found the coin I lost.' ¹⁰ So, I tell you, God's angels will be happy over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:1-10 AAT)

On a bronze plaque, underneath the Statue of Liberty, stands a poem written by Emma Lazarus. The last lines of this poem have lady liberty crying out:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

The Statue of Liberty – with all its promises – remains only a statue. It cannot give true liberty. Even America, with all its rights and freedoms, cannot give the true freedom every wretched soul needs. It cannot free a person from the burden of sin. It cannot give the freedom of eternal life. Only Jesus can do that.

Jesus is our true "Statue of Liberty" – only he is not a statue. He is the true, living Son of God. He is liberty personified. Jesus himself says: *The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because - He anointed Me to tell the poor the good news. He sent Me to announce to prisoners, "You are free," to the blind, "You will see again," to free those who are oppressed, to announce a season when the Lord welcomes people. (Luke 4:18-19 AAT).* And on another occasion, Jesus said: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28 NIV84).*"

Like the statue of liberty, Jesus welcomes all the hurt, the homeless and the refuse of society. He welcomes the sinner searching for forgiveness. But unlike the Statue of Liberty and the nation she represents, Jesus has the power to grant the true freedom we need.

Let us consider this truth under the theme: **Jesus welcomes sinners.** 1) *With great concern He searches for the lost.* 2) *With great Joy He carries them home.*

Part One: With Great Concern He Searches for The Lost

Our text finds Jesus in the company of Jewish outcasts: tax collectors and “sinners”. Any self-respecting Jew would have avoided these people. Why? Because their life-style was one of sin. I guess a comparison today would be if Jesus were surrounded by a crowd of gang bangers, prostitutes, and others whom the “good folk” of society would avoid at all cost. What would you say if you saw your pastor in the company of such people? Probably: “Pastor, don’t you know what **those** people do? Stay away from them!” Even though this might be our inclination, it was not Jesus’. He saw how brokenhearted these “sinners” were. They were repentant, and wanted to hear His preaching. They wanted to hear how Jesus was willing to die for their sins in order to forgive them. They wanted to hear about the Kingdom of God and how, through faith, Jesus would graciously rule in their hearts and help them live to his glory. Jesus, the Messiah, welcomed them, sinners whom society had already condemned. Just think: each one of them was special to the Son of God.

But the Pharisees and Bible scholars – Jewish society’s moral elite - muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Their complaining was really directed against Jesus. “If Jesus is such a good and righteous teacher, what is He doing in the company of social outcasts? Good people don’t mix with them. Jesus should know that *bad company corrupts good character*. People usually hang around those they are most similar to: therefore Jesus must be just like those sinners!”

You know, the Pharisees actually had one thing right: Jesus was like these sinners. The Bible says: “*God made Him Who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we would have the righteousness of God.*” (2 Corinthians 5:21 AAT). Jesus took our sins upon himself so that, when God the Father saw Jesus, He saw you and me, and every sinner that ever lived. On the cross God punished Jesus for all sin, so that now, when God looks at those who believe in Him, He sees his perfect Son. All our sins are gone! This is how wonderfully Jesus saved all of us, who were oppressed by sin, and outcasts of heaven.

Jesus, disgusted at what the Pharisees had just said, told two parables: ⁴ “*If anyone of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, don’t you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you find it?*” ⁵ “*When you find it, you lay it on your shoulders and are glad.*” ⁶ “*You go home and call your friends and neighbors together and say to them, ‘Be happy with me. I found my lost sheep!’*” ⁷ “*So, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine good people who don’t need to repent.*” ⁸ “*Or suppose a woman has ten coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the house and look for it carefully until she finds it?*” ⁹ “*When she finds it, she calls her women friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Be happy with me. I found the coin I lost.’*” ¹⁰ “*So, I tell you, God’s angels will be happy over one sinner who repents.*”

Jesus is our Good Shepherd. In love He chose us from before the creation of the world to come to faith and belong to Him. But, before any of us were brought to faith, we were like sheep helplessly lost in the wilderness of sin. (Isaiah 53:6). This is why Jesus went looking for us. Notice the care that Jesus uses in searching for His lost sheep, for sinners whom He has chosen to bring to faith. He cares for us personally. He knows each one of us by name (John 10:3,14). He sweeps the earth, much like the woman swept the ground on her hands and knees, searching for her lost coin. Jesus does not stop looking for lost souls until He finds them. When He finds them He lovingly calls them to repent through the preaching of his law. He reveals His forgiving love to them through the preaching of the Gospel and creates faith in their hearts. He lifts us up in His hands, holds us tenderly in his arms, and brings us home.

Jesus is still searching today. On another occasion, He once said: ¹⁶ “*I have other sheep, too, that are not in this fold.. I must lead those, too, and they will listen to My voice, and so they will become one flock with one Shepherd (John 10:16 AAT).*” You know, it is truly marvelous looking back at our conversion, how the LORD rescued us like a coin lost in the dirt. This might have happened early in life, shortly after we were born, when we were baptized into God’s saving name. It might have happened later in life when, at just the right time, the Holy Spirit saved us from our unbelief by bringing us to faith through the preaching of

the Gospel. And to think: Jesus planned this conversion from before creation, and was waiting for just the right time to find us! What joy we have considering His love for lost sinners like us. We were the ones who rebelled against God through sin. We deserve God's wrath and anger. But Jesus welcomes sinners and forgives us.

Part 2: With Great Joy He Carries Them Home.

Did you notice the joy Jesus has over each lost sinner who is found? Both the shepherd and the woman called all their friends and neighbors and rejoiced. "I found my lost sheep that wondered off! I found the coin that was missing! Rejoice with me."

When I read these parables as a child, I thought to myself: "Why would a shepherd call all his friends to rejoice over one lost sheep that He found? He had 100 of them. Or the woman who lost her coin? I don't call all my friends when I lose my keys or wallet and then find them again." Don't you think it might be a little overkill, that the two main characters in this story are so happy about the things they lost, that, from our perspective, might not be worth all that much? I truly believe that Jesus did this on purpose! Perspective is everything. To the Pharisees, the sinners and tax collectors were not worth much: they weren't even worth saving. Yet to God, they are worth everything: they are worth the blood of his Son, because that is what he paid for their release from sin.

We too, like the coin or the sheep, are not, in and of ourselves, worth that much. But God sought us out as if we were his most priceless treasure. After he found us, He rejoiced as if He had found the greatest treasure of all! Consider for a moment the last verse of our text. A more literal translation of the Greek would read: *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*" (Luke 15:10 NKJV) In other words, not only the angels, but God himself, in the presence of his angels, rejoices when a person turns to Christ in faith. The LORD is not looking for self-righteous people, who think that they don't need forgiveness, or who think that they can earn heaven on their own. There is no rejoicing in heaven over such people. No, God looks for the broken and contrite heart – the heart that realizes it has sinned and is sorry to God, but a heart that also looks to Jesus for full and free forgiveness, trusting that God is merciful, just as He promises. Over such a person the Lord rejoices. Such a person, by the power of the Spirit, has offered the sacrifice that God so dearly delights in; the sacrifice described in Psalm 51: *The sacrifice which God wants is a broken spirit. A broken and crushed heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:17 AAT).*

Look at the love Jesus has for each of us: a love that welcomed us, vile sinners that we were and still are; a love that spared nothing to search and find us; a love that rejoiced and brought us home. God's love is nothing we deserve, yet He nevertheless loves us so dearly. Even though we are, in actuality, worth nothing to him, He has placed on us the value of being worth everything, worth the blood of his own Son!

And this is why, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we evangelize. This is why we reach out, not only to the good and pious people of society, but also to the drug users and drug dealers, to the prostitutes and alcoholics. This is why we speak to those society has cast out, because they are souls Jesus bought with His own precious blood. They are precious in His sight. Being in their company, telling them the good news about Jesus, is being in the same crowd that Jesus himself graced with His presence.

We pray: "Dear Lord Jesus, our liberty and salvation, thank you for loving and saving us, even though we do not deserve it. Thank you for gracing us with your presence. Dear Lord, forgive us for the times when we have judged others as the Pharisees judged the sinners and tax collectors that you preached to. Give us your eyes to see and your heart to feel compassion towards all who are lost, even those whom we might consider too far-gone. Lord, let us always rejoice with you over every sinner who repents. Move us to speak to all people about your love. In your name we pray: Amen.