

## Luke 15

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, One with the Holy Spirit, Amen.

It's a well known passage today from the "Lost chapter" of Luke 15. And those are always a bit tricky to preach I think. "What's that one nuance they may not have heard?!" And I don't think that is a terrible thing to look for, it shows just how deep the scriptures are – that even a passage we have heard so often can open up something new, teach us something new.

But I wonder if sometimes we can miss the forest for the trees. What is the simple point Jesus is trying to make here?

Because we hear this passage and we see that Jesus is with the sinners. And so we have to point out that the "sinners" in the bible are the real bad social outcasts – not your garden variety sinner like we all think we are. And then, right away, we have to point out that Jesus, while he receives sinners, he doesn't affirm their sin.

True enough on all counts, no? Very true.

But do we see that these aren't the points the Lord is actually making in this passage? No, the Lord does not condone sin or support it. And yes, we know the hearts of all, even us "pretty good people" are dark and worthy of temporal and eternal punishment, but that's not what Jesus is primarily pointing out in Luke 15.

He is responding to the pharisees, the pharisees who would nod their heads in agreement that God doesn't condone sin. But are offended by his mere reception of people who do sin, and are convinced that in this regard they need no repentance. And if we don't think we need any repentance in that regard, then are we being honest with the darkness in our hearts, or are we just like the pharisees? And here, then is the point of Luke 15. He receives sinners that he might save sinners, and when such salvation occurs, the proper response is not spite, or jealousy, or offense, but rejoicing.

And he uses everyday examples, as usual, in his parables to make that point. Sheep who wander as we all do, lost because of where their own feet took them. Coins that are lost and are inanimate – they have no capacity to help themselves be found, can't cry out, can't look for help, they just sit there, passive, waiting to be found. Just like us all who were once dead, inanimate, in our trespasses and sins. But they are found, by the work and effort and desire of the shepherd and the lady of the house. And rejoicing ensues, how could it not? If the object was desired, then of course you rejoice when you find it. And to not rejoice when the lost are found, or to simply not bother to look, what does that imply of the object – it isn't wanted.

And so the very implication then of Jesus receiving sinners is that Jesus wants to find them, he desires for them to be his – he wants them. And the implication of opposing that is that they are not worth being looked for, or being found.

And so when the homeless person comes in the back during the service, yeah sometimes it gets awkward. And so the ushers meet him, ask him what he needs, or what they can get him, and everyone looks a little side-eyed out of safety precaution, I get it. And yes, he's probably just there for some money. But can we receive them as someone Jesus died for who is wanted.

Someone visits with family and they live a different lifestyle, or have a different faith. Can we receive them, even as we still continue to speak the truth in love?

And sometimes the world will put us in a tough spot – “go along with this harmful ideology or else you lose a friend, social standing, your job!” How do we navigate that with our consciences? It's hard, let's pray for grace in that regard.

I had someone tell me once ‘Jesus probably did carpentry work for “sinners”?’

And I responded, “Sure, but I don't think he ever carved an asherah pole.” And so we seek to drive between the two ditches. One ditch is sacrificing truth, condoning sin that harms people. The other is a pharisaical judgment that says we are better than someone, or that someone is not wanted by God. And so we say we hate the sin but love the sinner, true enough...

But here I go again... yes there are two ditches here, but which one is Jesus today, in Luke 15, warning us to avoid – the pharisaical one.

And so lets be honest. Let's ask the question, are there pet prejudices in our hearts?

I am not convinced that we are so closed minded that we wouldn't welcome a visitor with open arms, I know you will, but I am also not convinced that there are not shadows of grudges lurking in our hearts. Can we let this teaching of Jesus hit them and hurt them? Are there people we can't stand and, if we are honest, we don't want good things for them? Are there people we overlook without a thought or a prayer? Are there people we think deserve the bad things they got and are coming to them?

And at that point we go back to the beginning again. Where we confessed that the "sinners" need quotes because we are all sinners. And what do we deserve...? For all that we harbor in our hearts.

And when we are honest with that. When we are honest that there is darkness and grudges and lust and failure and so much in here. Well then guess what, you just realized you aren't a pretty good person, but a sinner. And one who is not the 99 who think they need no repentance, only Jesus needed no repentance, the pharisees did, we do, and when we actually admit that - and here is the comfort in our reading today - If you are a sinner, then, guess what... Jesus receives you. Not a

hypothetical sinner that needs a hypothetical Savior, no, only real sinners get a real Savior who really dies, and really lives. So you, real sinners, come to a real Savior who will receive you.

He leaves the flock behind and comes to you who realize that all people, even you, need repentance. He comes to you who are powerless to get your way to heaven, to find those pastures, who are unable to begin to move from the dark corners of this broken world, but he comes to you with light and brings you there. And the angels rejoice, in you.

If he didn't want you, he never would have come. But he did come and die for your sins, for all that is in here. And he is Risen, strong, almighty, and merciful, to give eternal gifts. And if you think, "well maybe that's for other people, not me," remember, if the object is worthless, no one would look for it. But he has searched for you. The waters of baptism upon your head, the word in your ears, the body and blood, are those accidents? Or ways in which God has come to you, claimed you, and carried you into his Kingdom.

This parable challenges our sinful pride and myopic views, let this word of Jesus do that, it was the intention of the parable. And when it has cut you low, may this same parable remind you of who exactly is there for you to give you grace

sufficient to wash each spot away. Fear not, child of God, you will find yourself before the King, and for you, His child, fear not, there will be much rejoicing.

Amen.