

Third Sunday after Trinity: July 3, 2022
“I’m Not Lost! You’re Lost! Right?”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is the parables of our Lord spoken in Luke 15.

As Jesus teaches, Luke makes it a point to note who is in fact there to hear these words. The makeup of the audience is so common that its significance is often overlooked. There were two different groups, but with glaringly similar problems. The tax collectors and sinners drew near in order to hear Jesus. The Pharisees and the scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”

To these groups Jesus responds with three parables. In the first He likens tax-collectors and sinners to sheep, in the second to a coin, and in the final to a son. One of the clearest points in these parables is quite obvious – Jesus seeks the lost. He has come to save the unsavory. He has come to rescue those who are in need of rescuing. All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.

The sins of man have been paid, and notice Jesus doesn’t identify the lost with a particular sin; the sin of man doesn’t define those who are in need of saving. Christ finds His sheep, His coins, and His sons mingling with pigs, covered in mud. He finds us starving and desperate for the worthless pods that Satan feeds to his demons. He comes to bring us to our senses, promising that He will take all the abuse and punishment for us. He welcomes sinner’s home as valued members of His family. The father’s statement is a summary of all three parables “***It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found.***”¹ The sum and substance of our faith is Jesus was crucified for sinners. He died so that sinners might live. His death on the cross was the payment for sin and it is He who saves sinners.

But there is the rub—who are the sinners? Who is it that Christ saves? The flesh cringes at the word “sin” and even Christians have tried to soften the word; they have tried to alleviate the abrasiveness that this word brings.

¹ Luke 15:32

Instead of talking about sin for what it is, we often try to pass it off or project it to others, because if we can diminish it enough, we think that we can dilute it to the point of not being quite as serious.

So, who are the sinners in need of saving? We have all worked with people we don't like. We've spent time in school in classes with others we don't really care for, and socialized with family members whom we know (or have been convinced) that we love them, but we would have to admit we really don't like them. We've all endured lazy malcontent co-workers who come in late, leave early, and do little while they are there. We've all suffered from people who call in sick when they're not sick, who make inappropriate remarks, who don't carry their weight. Sometimes it seems as though the worst people reap the benefits; they are promoted first and doted on by teachers.

That is what caused the Pharisees and scribes to grumble and complain. Jesus receives and eats with sinners. If He only knew what kind of people these really were, would He keep doing what He does? Is He blind? How can He really be the Son of God and not know the sorts of company that He keeps? Jesus responds to their grumbling with three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son.

We have tended to misunderstand these parables and to take them out of context. We have thought of ourselves as the lost sheep, coin, and son, who has been found, who was dead and who, in Christ, is now alive. That is not completely wrong, but it is not quite fully right either. The parables can be read in isolation, out of context, and show a good deal of the Kingdom and grace. It is not utterly inappropriate for Christians to identify themselves with the sheep, the coin, and the son, but it misses the context and the larger point being made.

Like the lazy worker who still wants all the credit. It comes in late to the assignment and misses the depth and beauty of the entire work. These three parables work together and are not to be simply understood in isolation; so, today, we are not going to run to the easy answer. Easy answers rarely satisfy in the long run anyways. Theology fit for twitter or bumper stickers doesn't hold up well in times of persecution. It doesn't hold much root for comfort and strength in cancer wards, broken homes, hospital beds, and prison cells.

If we want to read these texts, as Christians who are in Church, we need to be careful not to follow the world and fall into victim mentality. More often than not, we are not the tax collectors and sinners that are received. We are the Pharisees who are grumbling. You don't want that guy promoted. It is not fair. It won't be good for the company. Why should that kid get credit for your work? It's not fair. Why should my brother get credit for cleaning the house, when I did it while he just sat on his phone most of the time? You are outraged at the injustice and you are envious. You could do a better job and are far more worthy.

Neither are we mainly the sheep or the coin which was lost. We are the neighbors. You are invited to rejoice at what has been found, at the jerk who has been promoted. You are invited to do so, because the Kingdom's chief characteristic and greatest joy is grace. What is grace? It involves loving the unworthy, praying for those whom you might not want to pray for because according to you, they don't deserve it.

So then, you are not, in the first place, the son who went off to a foreign land and wasted his living with prostitutes. You are the older son who is invited to come in and rejoice because the one who hated and betrayed you, the one who stole your inheritance and told lies about you, the one who shamed your family and hurt your father, is back.

Can you rejoice at such a thing? That is the question that must penetrate our pious shells and sanctimonious displays. It is the question that cuts to the heart and shows us for what we are. It exposes our hatred of grace. It lays bare for all to see the truly wicked and satanic desire for justice that lies within us for others.

There is something broken in us, something envious and jealous of everyone, that wants others to get what they deserve. This is the seed of the devil and gives rise to his children. It looks and thinks just like the devil. Our English word "devil" is the Greek word *diabolos*, which literally means slanderer; and this is exactly to what this seed gives rise.

The devil cares very much about justice for others. He does not want the office idiot to be promoted. He wants only merit to be rewarded. He always thinks he has earned everything that he has, that he is entitled to more. To obtain what he thinks is justice in his own right he quickly and brutally uses insults and defamation to disparage and destroy. Instead of the best construction, our seeming opponent is vilified.

That corruption inside of us, that burning anger over injustice, isn't the devil, it is our true selves, our old man, our corrupted sinful nature. It is that which made Darwin think that the history of the world was driven by the survival of the fittest and Marx to think that everything hinges on class warfare. It is that which makes men scoff at Pacifism or mercy.

That is what Jesus is up against in the Pharisees and in us. The Pharisees were upright in an outward way. They were as good as good men get. They spoke piously and guarded their lips for the most part. They didn't cheat on their wives or get divorced. They honored those in authority—that is, they certainly weren't going to upset Rome. They mowed their lawns and parked between the lines. They clocked in on time, worked hard, and paid their bills. They even volunteered and gave to charities. They made good husbands and wives for one's children.

But none of those things save them. They are damned and they go home condemned. We often say that this is because they will not repent, and that's not entirely false. But so also we should note that they will not repent because they hate grace — even though they will never admit it.

The Psalmist teaches us to pray, ***“If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.”***² Forgiveness and repentance go hand-in-hand. The order is not what we usually think. The Holy Spirit works repentance through forgiveness. Being forgiven, we fear the Lord. But some reject that forgiveness; they hate grace, they insist on their own merit and will not repent. That is what is wrong with the Pharisees and it beckons us more than we care to admit. As much as we shirk at it, it is good that the office idiot gets in for free.

² Psalm 130:3–4

Now the world sees in these parables just this: people love their stuff. They love sheep, coins, and sons. The point seems to be that sinners are valuable to God, maybe even that He loves them.

But there is more here than that. The compassionate Father invites you to rejoice with Him over sinners who repent, over grace bestowed upon those who do not deserve it. And just under surface, He invites you to rejoice over the death of the Son who has died in the place of those who hated and murdered Him and tried to steal what was His.

In fact, the sheep, the coin, and the son were not valuable. That is actually the point. It cost more to recover them than they were ever worth. The point is not that they were worth it, but God is like an obsessively, idiotic shepherd, woman, and father who love too much. It is not the son who is the most wasteful in the parable; it is the Father. He throws good money after bad on an hourly basis. God pays for labor not performed, for goods not delivered. He promotes not only the office idiot and the lazy one; but He forsakes the faithful Son, not the snotty older son, but the truly faithful, obedient, and good Son, for those who murder Him. The party the woman throws costs more than the coin that she recovered. If the parables ever present to you a reasonable God with whom you can identify, you are reading them wrong.

This extravagance of God is expounded by the costly celebration, which itself is nothing but grace. The Lord fattens up His faithful Son to serve as food for the unworthy. It is the unworthy and underserving that are clothed with His own clothing and given the family ring, the family seal, upon which all know they are actually part of the family. They didn't earn their way into the family; that's not how inheritance works. They are restored to honor in the family. God has had mercy on poor, miserable sinners.

The feast is prepared. ***“What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.”***³ I take not only the cup, but more. What should I do for Him who has done everything for me? What can we do for the One who gives so graciously and abundantly?

³ Psalm 116:12–13

What else should we do for the One who sets a table before me in the presence of my enemies where my cup overflows? What else should we do for the One who richly and daily forgives all my sins? We rejoice and receive more and more. It is a wonderful thing for us that the Kingdom is wasteful and extravagant in grace.

We come in humility and kneel before our Lord. He comes out to meet us and entreat us to repent and rejoice. He bids us to join in the Holy Supper, with those who have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, like us, where together we rejoice in the goodness of God that promotes and uses fools and redeemed sinners lest there be no room for me.

Brothers and sisters, may we sing together,
“For Your Son has suffered for me,
 Giv’n Himself to rescue me,
Died to save me and restore me,
 Reconciled and set me free.
Jesus’ cross alone can vanquish
These dark fears and soothe this anguish.”⁴ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁴ Lord, to You I Make Confession LSB 608:3

Prayer of the Church
Third Sunday after Trinity
3 July 2022

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father, by Your Spirit help us to humble ourselves under Your mighty hand in times of trial, that at the proper time You may exalt us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, You have provided pastors to preach Your Word, administer Your Sacraments and shepherd Your people. Guard them from leading Your sheep astray. Grant that, through their preaching, Your people may be pierced by the Law and saved by the Gospel. Finally, shield them from the assaults of the devil, who would silence Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Father, You watch and wait for the return of Your wandering children. Look with compassion on our brothers and sisters who have left Your house and squandered their inheritance in Christ. Give repentance to those who in Your house scorn the grace You have given to their brothers and sisters and cause us all to rejoice with You at your outpouring of Grace for all people. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You have given us this good land as our heritage. Grant that we remember Your generosity and constantly do Your will. Bless our land with honest industry, truthful education, and an honorable way of life. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion, from pride and arrogance, and from every evil course of action. Grant that we, who came from many nations with many different languages, may become a united people. Support us in defending our liberties, and give those to whom we have entrusted the authority of government the spirit of wisdom, that there may be justice and peace in our land. When times are prosperous, may our hearts be thankful, and in troubled times do not let our trust in You fail. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *William and Thatcher* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Tim & Sherry* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Blessed Father, give all in our midst who suffer in body or mind [*including Marvin, Ruth, Pam, Zoey, John, David, Merrill, Greg, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty), and those we name in our hearts*] comfort in their trials. Draw them to cast all their anxieties upon You, as You care for us; and at the proper time, grant them health, healing, strength and peace in accord with Your will. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, though we were lost and dead in our sins, yet Your Son has found us and made us alive through His Word. Lead us in joy to Your table this day to feast on His body and blood, and grant that we would ever give thanks for Your love and grace with the angels, archangels and all the company of heaven. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we all like sheep have gone astray and allowed ourselves to be led from the right path by Satan and our sinful flesh. We implore You, graciously forgive us our sins for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Enliven our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, that we may abide in Your Word in true repentance and steadfast faith, and so continue in Your Church to the end and obtain eternal salvation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.