

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 11, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 15:1-10 (NIV)

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2) But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "**This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.**" 3) Then Jesus told them this parable: 4) "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5) And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6) and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7) 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. 8) "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9) And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10) In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Fellow sinners;

Welcome Race Fans – we'll see signs like that from time to time in our area displayed by local businesses when there is a big race at Road America. If I ran a restaurant, I'd be inclined to put up a sign like that to attract more customers. I wonder what the local "regulars" think about all of those tourists who invade their favorite eating spot. At least some of them may not be so welcoming. Maybe some of them even might begin to grumble and mutter if they have to wait longer to eat because of the crowds.

The city of Jerusalem and its citizens were preparing to welcome an influx of visitors for the annual Passover Celebration. Jesus and his disciples were among those headed there. This would be Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem. Already now, the religious leaders who would plot to have him arrested and crucified were watching his actions carefully. They had become indignant with Jesus when he healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath day.

As Jesus made his way to Jerusalem, crowds of people gathered around him to hear what he had to say. These crowds included some rather "interesting" individuals. **Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.** That really isn't that surprising. After all Jesus had invited Matthew the tax collector to be one of his disciples. Matthew had invited some of his friends to a meal to meet Jesus. Jesus had put out the welcome mat for them. He shared the love and grace of God with them. It's not surprising then that tax collectors and sinners were gathering around to hear Jesus. He didn't shame them, he didn't pile on the guilt. He called them to repent and assured them that they were precious to him and that he would spare no effort to rescue them.

Theme: Jesus Welcomes Sinners

1. They are precious to him
2. He spares no effort to rescue them

It's not surprising that Jesus who came to seek and to save the lost would welcome sinners. But what may seem surprising is that the **Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."** In their minds if Jesus really was the Messiah, he would have known just what kind of people they were. They'd never dream of associating with tax collectors, prostitutes, or others whose evident sin shamed their lives.

We might have the tendency to mutter amongst ourselves, "What was wrong with them? How could they react this way?" But the parables of this text call upon us to stop short and to examine our own attitudes and reactions to those around us.

It's easy for us to express holy outrage when we hear about such hot-button social topics as drug abuse, the LGBT agenda, and the callousness of those who live in the inner city. Would we be willing to welcome individuals who are struggling and wrestling with the likes of those kinds of sins? Would we eat with them? Perhaps a better question is, "Would they feel comfortable approaching us, to invite us to eat with them so they could find relief their guilt and shame?" Would our lack of love for sinners drive them away?

If you one of the individuals in our text which group would you be in? Would you be with those who muttered against Jesus? Would you be with those who were gathered around Jesus to listen to him?

It was the sinful pride in the hearts of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law which prompted Jesus to tell the parables of our text. Let's not be blind to our own need to be comforted by the fact that Jesus welcomes sinners. It's easy to point out the sins of others and to rejoice that Jesus is willing to welcome them. It's another thing to recognize the sinful pride and arrogance that lurks in our hearts.

As we examine the parables of our text may the Holy Spirit put to death any sinful arrogance that lurks in our hearts by leading us to see that Jesus welcomes us. The understanding that we are precious to him and that he spared no effort to rescue us will enable us to show love and compassion for sinners of every stripe!

Jesus told them (those who muttered against him) **this parable: 4) "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5) And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6) and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'**

Probably none of us has ever lost a sheep. Maybe we had a dog that ran away though. In either case once we discovered the missing critter – we'd drop what we were doing and frantically search until the wayward animal was found because it was precious to us.

Jesus adds a few details to drive home the point that the lost sheep was precious. It was one of a hundred sheep. That's a rather large flock. Under such circumstances, only the most caring of shepherds would notice that one of his 100 sheep was missing. It would be easy for one of the flock to carelessly wander away from the watchful eye of the shepherd who feeds and nourishes it and provides for its safety. What is it that prompts this alert and caring shepherd to safely leave the 99 and set out to search for the 1? There might be several answers. He's a shepherd and that's what shepherds do. But, there's probably a bit more to it than that. Why would we drop everything to search for our run-away dog? Compassion and concern would prompt our actions. Without intervention by the caretaker of the wandering sheep would face many dangers. It might even starve to death. The shepherd goes into action because the sheep is precious to him and he is really to risk his own life for the sake of this sheep.

That explains the shepherd's reaction when he finds the lost sheep. He safely tucks it under his arm or carries it across his shoulders all the way back home. He rejoices with his friends and neighbors. Jesus assures us that God feels the same way about the people under his care. There are billions of people under the heavenly Father's care and he does not want any of them to remain lost in sin. That is why he sent his Son, the Good Shepherd, Jesus to seek and to save the lost.

All are precious to him. That is why there is rejoicing in heaven when sinners repent. Jesus said: **7) 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.**

There can be no rejoicing over those who fail to recognize their sins and their need for the Savior's sacrifice. The proud, the arrogant, and the self-righteous fill the Lord's heart with sorrow. He seeks them. He calls them. He wants to shelter them and care for them in his grace and forgiveness. He loved them so much that he sent his own Son to be punished in their place. But, alas they do not receive him.

Jesus uses two parables to warn us not to fall into that trap. He wants us to understand that he welcomes us and wants us to eat with him at the banquet tables of heaven. He want us to know that we are precious to

him – so precious that the very hairs on our heads are numbered. That is why he will spare no effort to rescue us. Jesus makes that point in the following parable.

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9) And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'

Notice the effort on the part of the lady who has discovered that one of her coins is missing. She doesn't just shrug her shoulders and say, "Easy come, easy go." She doesn't forget about that coin. It's precious to her and so she spares no effort in her attempt to find it. She gets out her oil lamp so she can search in all the dark places of her home – the dark corners, behind the cupboards, under the beds etc. She sweeps away all the dust bunnies that have collected in those hard to reach places. She searches carefully in every possible nook and cranny until she finds her coin. After she finds it she no doubt tucks it away in a safe place and then she shares her joy with her friends and neighbors. **In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."**

God doesn't approve of sin or overlook it. He hates sin and condemns those who stubbornly resist his efforts to call them to repentance. Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them – not to join them in their sin but so that he could point their sins out to them. He wanted to have the opportunity to warn them about the consequences of their sins. He wanted them to understand the grace of God that sent him to be their Savior. He wanted them to come to him with their guilt and their burdens so he could give them rest.

Jesus' words were directed to those who felt that they were superior to the "sinners and tax collectors" who were gathering around Jesus. He wanted them to share in the joyous celebration of the angels of God. He wanted them to appreciate the effort that God made to rescue sinners. He sent his Son to seek and to save the lost. That Son fulfilled all righteousness. He laid down his life for sinners. He defeated sin, death and the devil for them and for us.

Now he invites sinners of all stripes to feast with him. Jesus' words to the Pharisees and teachers of the law remind us to treat everyone as a soul that is precious to the Lord and who was rescued by the Lord. That's not always easy for us to do. It's not always easy to think of the drug dealer, the gun toting teens who high-jack cars in the city, the people who condemn us for our stand on Scriptural values as they clamor for their "right" to have their sinful ways legalized and legitimized by society as souls who are precious to the Lord.

What is that will soften our hearts? How is it possible for us let our joy over a sinner who repents shine brighter than our disgust over the sins of others? It's the understanding that but for the grace of God we could be numbered among the ranks of those we judge. Like the Apostle Paul we need to see ourselves as the worst of sinners. With an attitude like that, we won't be able to look down on others. We'll be forced to look up to the grace of God and to praise him for regarding us as being precious in his sight and for sparing no effort to rescue us. When we can rejoice over the fact that Jesus welcomes us to eat with him, then we will also be willing to rejoice with the angels in heaven when others repent of their sins and are welcomed to the Lord's family.

But, we won't stop there. Motivated by our Savior's love for us, we'll put his love into action in our lives. We'll make it our mission as it was his mission to seek and to save the lost. We'll avoid the temptation to preach the law in an effort to make ourselves look good. We'll gladly share the Gospel of Jesus and his efforts to rescue sinners. Because their souls are precious to the Lord they will become precious to us. We'll make sacrifices and efforts to share the love of Jesus with them. And we'll rejoice with the angels in heaven when the Lord blesses those efforts. Jesus welcomes sinners. They are precious to him and he spared no effort to rescue them.

Dear friends, Jesus welcomes you! You are precious to him! He spared no effort to rescue you! May those words fill your hearts with joy and your lives with actions which reflect Jesus love for sinners.

Amen.