

III TRINITY 2015

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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1 PETER 5.5 ST. LUKE 15.1



A farmer loses one of his sheep...a woman loses a silver coin...something cherished gets lost...something cherished gets found. Restoration to completeness takes place. It's time to rejoice and celebrate!

During the course of his travels, Jesus attracted large crowds. Quite often those who came to hear Jesus were tax collectors and shady characters of dubious reputation. They were the type of people no respectable religious leader of the time would have anything to do with.

In today's Gospel, not only does Jesus have the nerve to welcome tax collectors and shady characters to come and listen to him, he actually sits down and has lunch with them. The religious leaders openly criticize Jesus for associating with those they call sinners.

Jesus responds to the criticism by telling two parables...the lost sheep and the lost coin. There is a third parable...the lost son...we will talk about in a few weeks. The parables show us just how much Jesus dislikes the arrogant, self-righteousness attitudes of the religious leaders he encounters.

The farmer in the story loves his sheep and takes care of them. They are all important to him. When one sheep goes wandering off he looks for it until he finds it and brings it back. His flock is restored to completeness and it's time to celebrate and rejoice.

The woman in the story may have been a widow. The ten silver coins may have been an inheritance or her life savings. When she loses one silver coin she looks for the lost coin until she finds it. Her life savings are restored to completeness and it's time to celebrate and rejoice.

The two parables are about God's love, compassion and infinite power to forgive and welcome home anyone, no matter how degraded and excluded from respectable society they might be or might consider themselves. God begins the process of restoration and forgiveness...he actively seeks those who are lost and is happy when they are found and rescued from evil.

The religious leaders of Jesus' time were quick to condemn not only the work tax collectors and shady characters did, but the tax collectors and shady characters themselves. They could not understand God had any interest in saving people they had written off as unsalvageable. Everyone is important to God...he does not consider anyone worthless or not deserving his attention.

It is in Jesus' new and radical teaching that no one is beyond God's love and help...no matter how depraved or indifferent the person might be...that the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin apply to us today just as much as they applied to the religious leaders and others who heard them directly from Jesus' mouth 2000 years ago.

Arrogant self-righteous pride is the worst kind of pride and something that we must all assiduously work to avoid in the Church. We are called to show the same kind of love, compassion and humility Jesus showed. We are also called to confront inappropriate behavior in others. But we do need to be careful our effort to correct another person's bad behavior does not inflate our own sense of self-importance.

Jesus shows us through his own acts of humility that God's capacity to forgive is infinite and available to anyone who asks for it regardless of who they are, or where they live, or whether they are rich or poor. Humility leads us to become the kind of people God wants us to be...full of compassion and mercy and love toward others. Our friend Saint Peter tells us we should all be subject to each other and wear humility like a coat.

God loves all of humanity. He loves...you and me...sinner and saint...tax collector and priest...politician and teacher. Sometimes we get lost and God has to come looking for us. Jesus tells us when that happens and we get found...the Angels of God rejoice because we have come home to God, safe and secure, and no longer lost.

Restoration to completeness has happened. Let's rejoice and celebrate!

