

III TRINITY 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

1 PETER 5.5-11 St. LUKE 15.1-10



Tax collectors and sinners...the kinds of people no respectable religious person would want to be around...except they are exactly the kinds of people who come to hear what Jesus has to say...and they like what they hear...it is possible to lose our way in life...and still get found and rescued.

This morning's Gospel is a short story Jesus tells to make this point and it contains new and radical teaching about forgiveness. Today we hear parts one and two of a trilogy about something precious and valuable that gets lost and then gets found...and the joy and happiness that follows when the lost items are found.

The first part of the story is about a farmer who has 100 sheep and loses one of them. Sheep were an important commodity and figure prominently throughout the Bible. The farmer goes looking for his lost sheep and when he finds it brings it back to the safety of the flock. We shouldn't conclude the 99 sheep were less important...they are all important. The farmer calls his friends and they celebrate because the flock is whole again.

The second part of the story is about a woman who has ten silver coins and loses one. The woman in the story was likely poor and a widow. The ten silver coins represent ten days wages...perhaps her life savings. She is desperate to find the lost coin and when she does...she calls her friends to help her celebrate finding the coin.

The religious leaders of Jesus' time were quick to condemn tax collectors and other characters they considered shady and disreputable. They lumped them altogether in a category called 'sinners'. They considered them beyond redemption. Jesus' point: God thinks everyone is important and doesn't consider anyone worthless.

Today's Gospel is 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.

This was new and radical teaching for both the religious leaders and the tax collectors and other marginalized people of society. The religious leaders believed God forgave people who confessed their sins...they couldn't understand a God who went looking for people who had lost their way. Tax collectors and 'sinners' saw in Jesus there is a way out of the messes we create in our lives. Later this summer we will hear the third part of the story...the Lost Son.

One of the most compelling icons depicts Jesus as the Good Shepherd carrying a lamb on his shoulders...back to the safety of the sheep pen. Another icon shows Jesus carrying a man...safe a secure on his shoulders. In Psalm 95...we are God's people...he cares for us...and we are the flock for which he provides. When we find ourselves getting lost...he comes looking for us...we get rescued.

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 stories 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.

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. Of course we have to want to be brought home. Jesus tells us when we get found...the Angels of God rejoice because we have come home to God, safe and secure, and we are no longer lost.

Let's rejoice and celebrate!

