

The Lost is Found

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost) is Luke 15:1-10. In Luke 15 Jesus tells three parables, the first two are a part of our text. These parables were spoken by Jesus as he journeyed swiftly to his destination in Jerusalem.

Both the tax collectors/sinners and the Pharisees/scribes heard these three parables. Jesus wants each group to hear these parables and see themselves in them, for the parables illustrate that the nature of the kingdom is joyous feasting with God. (CC)

The tax collectors were despised and cast out of the synagogues by the church leaders of their time. They were also not permitted to associate on a plane of equality with the Jews in good standing.

The tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus and his message in great numbers. The form of the word “gathering” meant that they kept on coming. It was as though there was a sucking power that Jesus had. This was so because they were weary of all the “law-like” messages the religious leaders inflicted on them. They wanted to hear the gospel taught by Jesus.

The religious leaders’ grumbling meant that they started a dirty rumor about Jesus. It as if they were saying “He is bringing disgrace upon the whole business of rabbinic work.”

The lost sheep in verses 3-7 represents the sinner, while God, especially the Son, is the shepherd. The found sheep is every Christian, rescued and delivered by God. The neighbors are the saints and angels who rejoice together. (TLSB)

When one sheep got lost the shepherd did everything in his power to recue that sheep. That did not mean the 99 were neglected because a shepherd typically watched 3-40 sheep and had one or two helpers. The emphasis is not on neglecting the flock, but on seeking the lost.

This meant going into ravines in stormy weather and taking risks. And when found the shepherd would tie the sheep’s feet in front of shepherd’s neck. This was done because it was presumed that the sheep was exhausted and so the only way the sheep could get lost was if the shepherd got lost.

The same intensity is exhibited in verses 8-10 about the lost coin. Unlike the wandering sheep, the coin is inanimate, emphasizing its complete helplessness. Perhaps a collection of coins or bits of silver, worn as a headdress, were brought into the marriage as the woman’s dowry and meant to sustain the family in times of want. The value of such a coin, a day’s wages, was once equivalent to the price of a sheep. (TLSB)

Near Eastern houses frequently had no windows and only earthen floors, making the search for a single coin difficult. The unrepentant sinner is like a coin lost in the darkness. Once lost, we have no more ability to find the Lord than the coin has to find its owner. Yet, the good news of Christ gives “light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (1:79). (TLSB)

Prayer: Thank you, merciful Lord, for seeking us when we had no power to seek you. Bring us home, dear Lord, and let there be joy in heaven. Grant us daily repentance. Amen. (TLSB)