

Our Mission:

To share Christ with the world
and grow disciples for Jesus



Loving God and Loving Neighbor as Ourselves

Background:

Three stories about what has been lost in response to the religious leaders murmuring. There was a divide in Jesus' day between the righteous and the 'lost' based upon the observance of the religious law. As is true today, however, the law favored certain people of status. It served as a means of condemnation rather than of liberation or justification. Do our beliefs today open or close the door of the church to such a change of heart?

Theology Connection:

Jesus uses these parables to flip the script. Whereas the religious expended great effort to prove they were good enough for God, Jesus' focus was upon those who were so bad they could not justify themselves, thereby needing God. The religious wanted to protect God's dignity from a fallen humanity, but Jesus was interested in preserving our human dignity through God's divine love. The religious cannot rejoice with God because it offends their sense of righteousness. Can we?

Application:

The father in this story embarrasses himself again and again because of his love for both his boys. This story would have been hard to hear in Jesus' day. Perhaps we need to reclaim the offense of this text, by not only committing to helping those in need, but seeing them as the instruments and not the recipients of God's grace in our lives. Are we willing to jeopardize our own hard-earned status in life, by our care and concern for those who are 'lost?'

The Text: Luke 15: 1-32

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³Then 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? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷I 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? ⁹And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." ¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them. ¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So, they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' ²⁸"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' ³¹"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

ADULT

We can likely identify with the father in this story. Every parent has had a moment or many when our kids looked at us as nothing more than an ATM machine. How do we respond when a relationship is replaced by a transaction? How do we love even when it appears the target of our affection is untouched? Can we gladly welcome back even if we are unsure if a lesson has been learned?

YOUTH

Please read Luke 15:1-32

Our text is Luke's account of three parables, each of which describes the finding of a lost item, and each of which describes the joy and celebration, which resulted from the finds.

In the beginning, we see that God welcomes sinners. God rejoices when the sinners come to him. Should we be following in that example?

As citizens, I think we should learn from this example, welcome everyone, and share the love and knowledge of Christ with whomever wants to listen.

Do you find it hard to share Christ with others, especially ones that have no knowledge or a different view than you might have? What are ways we can overcome those feelings?

Let us pray:

Dear God, please guide us and help us welcome sinners as you do. We appreciate your stories and examples. In Jesus name we pray: Amen.

CHILDREN'S

Read and Summarize:

One day, some of Jesus' followers began discussing which people were the most important in the kingdom of God. Were kings and queens the most important? Were church leaders the most important? They thought, maybe only good people who were close to God were important. So, they asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus didn't answer in the way they expected. To Jesus, each and every person is important in the kingdom of God. Even the smallest child is important. Even someone who is not making the right choices is important, He wants everyone to follow Him. To help everyone understand this, Jesus decided to tell them a story called a parable.

Parable of the Lost Sheep:

Once a shepherd had a flock of 100 sheep. The shepherd loved every one of his sheep, he even had names for them. One day he counted his sheep and found that there were only 99 instead of 100! Even though 99 were safe, the shepherd was so concerned about the 1 sheep that was lost. Immediately, he left the other sheep and set off looking for the lost sheep. He searched everywhere, and finally he found it! The shepherd was so relieved and happy, he lifted the sheep onto his shoulders and carried him all the way back to join the rest of the flock.

1. What did you learn from this story?
2. What is your favorite part of the story?

God made everyone on the earth, and each and every person is important to Him!

Pray:

Dear God,
Thank you for loving us, please help us to love others in the same way.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen!