

Trinity 3
 June 28, 2009
 Micah 7:18-20; I Tim. 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? 9 And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (ESV)

Martin Luther in 1533 opened his sermon on the Gospel lesson today with these words, "This is one of the most comforting Gospels of the entire year. For it presents a beautiful picture of Christ in which he compares himself with a shepherd who earnestly searches for poor sinners, to bring them back, so that the wolf, the devil, doesn't get them and they be eternally lost. Incredibly sweet are these words when he says that the angels in heaven, those majestic creatures, rejoice over one sinner who repents."¹

Luther is right; it is very comforting that Christ is so concerned with us His sheep. Remember that Jesus has redeemed His lost and condemned sheep, purchased and won them from all sins, from death, and the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. This is why Jesus, The Good Shepherd Who lays His life down in the place of His sheep, is so concerned when just one sheep goes astray and gets lost. Each sheep cost Him dearly - and therefore - Christ tirelessly seeks His lost sheep in the wilderness. He wants all of the sheep that He purchased to repent and believe the Gospel and thus be saved.

Jesus knows that sheep alone in the wilderness are helpless. They are vulnerable to the wolf, Satan, and they aren't capable of finding their own way home. In the wilderness Jesus knows that Satan lays traps. Satan tries to get sheep to deny something to be sinful like, living together before marriage, adultery, drunkenness, divorce, and greed. Satan also shoots darts that tempt sheep to think that what they are doing is sinful, but that it is really no big deal - everybody sins all the time - and God will forgive anyway. Satan wants you sheep to think that it doesn't matter how you live because "were all sinners and God doesn't really mind." The person who listens to a sermon, but is comfortable when repentance is preached and isn't really concerned about God's Law

¹ Luther p. 250

and the fear of the Lord - and just shrugs his shoulders - waits for the Gospel part of the sermon - and then leaves the Divine Service to embrace his same sins - is completely lost. These traps kill, steal, and destroy repentance and faith. Jesus knows that sheep that are caught in a sin and are unrepentant need to be gently restored or they will be lost and land in hell. They must be found and lovingly picked up by the Good Shepherd and carried on His shoulders. It is comforting that Jesus does all of the seeking, finding, and saving. This finding causes a joyous party. **Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.** Jesus did not come for the righteous, but to save sinners.

This is the context of our Gospel lesson. Jesus came to seek sinners - and here they are - tax collectors and sinners, drawing near to hear Jesus' Word. Jesus, like His forerunner John, was preaching repentance. These lost sinners came repenting and heaven rejoiced. Yet, there were also Pharisees and Scribes present who rejected John's baptism unto repentance, as well as Christ's call to repent. But keep in mind that Jesus wasn't only there to save the lost tax collectors and sinners. There really is no such thing as 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. Scripture says, "No one is righteous, not not one." The Pharisees were just as lost as the tax collectors and Jesus longed for their repentance just as much. This is what is so gracious about God. Jesus came, not to condemn the world, but to save it. Jesus came for the entire world - for tax collectors, Scribes, Pharisees, Jews, and Gentiles. He kept the law for us all and died for us all. He wants all of us to enjoy the benefit of His saving work by hearing His Word and repenting. We are the valuable coin and the lost sheep that are saved by grace alone through faith and not by the works of the law.

It is this Gospel that is so hard for the Pharisees and our sinful flesh to swallow. Our sinful flesh is always drawn to salvation achieved under the Law. The Law of God says that God is pleased with those who do good and angry at those who do evil. God says, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments." Our sinful flesh agrees with salvation by the Law. This is why we are constantly trying to justify our actions before God and men - or - hiding from God because we think He is mad at us for our sins.

The Pharisees, who by outward standards had kept the Law, thought they were worthy of God's favor, but not the Law breaking tax collectors and sinners. This is why they grumbled saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." The Pharisees, by the Law, thought that they and Jesus shouldn't associate with sinners. They thought that the Messiah should come and praise them for their service to God and punish those law breaking tax collectors and sinners. This is why they couldn't reconcile Jesus' claim to be the Messiah and His eating with sinners.

But before we flog the Pharisees for their conclusion, let's be honest about ourselves. Do we grumble when a tattooed, drug user, low life of society, with torn blue jeans, comes through our doors on Sunday morning and draws near to hear Jesus speak? Are our thoughts really that different than the Pharisees? Do we think we are worthy to be carried on the shoulders of Christ, but others aren't? Beware of this thinking - it is the leaven of the Pharisees. By the Law we are all the same. By the Law, we are all indeed chief of sinners. By the Law we deserve to be left in the wilderness to be eaten by the

wolf. Luther said in the same sermon quoted earlier, “For we humans are all sinners and there isn’t a one whom the devil hasn’t frightened into the wilderness, nor anyone who after his baptism hasn’t gone astray like a lost sheep and thus sinned against his God.”² But don’t despair and have a fearful conscience. Jesus doesn’t go out into the wilderness to yell at His lost sheep for wandering away. He doesn’t go out there to throw His hands up and say, “I am done with you and your sins against me.” No, He comes and hears your confession and picks you up onto His shoulders and absolves you. Jesus seeks and saves the lost.

It isn’t your works that make you a sheep or not a sheep. Jesus calls you His sheep and you are. In your Baptism you are covered with the sinless Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Jesus never wandered and sinned like we do. He walked to the wilderness and defeated the attacks of the devil in our place. He walked to the cross and received the punishment for our hating God - and in exchange - we get God’s love to a thousands generations because Jesus loved God and kept His commands perfectly in our place. We, the helpless sheep - we, the lost coin, are found by Jesus. He washes us clean with His Word and invites us to eat with Him. At His Table He receives us sinners and eats with us. He serves us His flesh and blood for the forgiveness of all our sins. We draw near to Jesus as repentant beggars, repentant Pharisees, and repentant tax collectors. We are not worthy to eat with Jesus by our merit, but we come because Jesus’ promise is sure, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” You come boldly and confidently to Him because He says that this meal is, “For you.” He tells us to come, not because we are worthy, but because we are covered with His worthiness and need the meal to sustain us in the faith unto life everlasting. So, repent of your sins, but don’t have a bad conscience. Jesus doesn’t seek you His dear sheep to punish you. **This man receives sinners and eats with them.** The angels and archangels praise and rejoice, and so can we. Amen.

² Luther p. 254